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About the Authors

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Among her main works in Italian : *L' armonia estetica. Lineamenti di una civilta laotziana* (Bari, 1973), *La parole e la forma* (Bari 1977), *La creativita. Le basi poetiche della mente* (Milan 1987), *La cognizione estetica tra Oriente e Occidente* (Milan 1987).

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One of Italy's most provoking thinkers (his is the controversial Manifesto on 'weak thought'), Vattimo is the author of numerous works on modern German philosophy, on problems related to Nihilism and hermeneutics in post-modern culture, such as : *Al di la del soggetto. Nietzsch, Heidegger e l, ermeneutica* (Milan 1984), *La fine della modernita* (Milan 1985), *Le mezze verita* (Turin 1988), *La societa trasparente* (Milan 1989). He is currently editor of *Annuario filosofico*, an yearly series published by Laterza, Bari.

He is professor of theoretical philosophy at the University of Turin, where he directs "La rivista di Estetica", the influential philosophic magazine formerly directed by the main inspirator of the Turin School, the late Luigi Pareyson.

Stefano Zecchi

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Aldo Trione

A leading figure in the Italian aesthetic community and President of AISE, Trione has developed in the last twenty years peculiar researches in the philosophy of mind based on Leibniz, in the *logos* of poetry and symbol, in the phenomenological identity of "*Poiesis*". Among his main works : *Reverie e immaginario*, 1981 (Sp. tr. *Ensonacion imaginario*, Madrid 1989); *Valery: Metodo e critica del fare poetico*, 1983, *L' estetica della mente*, 1987 (Eng. tr. New York 1991); *L' ostinata armonia. Filosofia e estetica tra '800 e '900*, Bari 1991.

He is Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Professor of aesthetics at the University of Salerno.

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Luisa Bonesio

Aesthetician and writer, she teaches aesthetics at the University of Pavia. The philosophy of Sublime in a Heideggerian perspective, Nietzsche's and Benjamin's thought are among the main themss of her theoretical research, which runs parallel to an intense involvement in her own literary writing. Among Bonesio's theoretical works : *Lo stile della filosofia. Estetica e scrittura da Nietzsche a Blanchot*, Milan 1983; *Il sublime e lo spazio, Ricerca sul simbolismo dell 'ideale estetico*, Milan 1985; *La ragione estetica*, Milan 1990.

Editorial

GRAZIA MARCHIANO

The essays I have the pleasure of introducing to readers of the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* are a fairly representative sample of the situation, rich and varied in theories and methods, of aesthetics in Italy, reviewed here in its récent past and in some of today's most promising research perspectives.

I will not venture here to express general opinions on a tradition of thought whose roots in this country are far older than the age of *modernity* and the *post-modern* which a certain widespread critical tendency in Italy and elsewhere has almost made a category in its own right in the phenomenology of contemporary culture. The notable investment of intellectual energy in theorizing an end of modernity by leading thinkers like, in Italy, Gianni Vattimo[1], and the focusing on modernity as aesthetics in a number of provocative debates and analyses spanning East and West, from Canada to Spain to China[2], strike one, when viewed from a somewhat ampler perspective, as a last resort on the part of disillusioned reason to cling to a speculative 'time' whose days appear to be number of which, however, it is loth to take leave, out of an intrinsic, radical uncertainty as to the future directions of thought.

A perturbing theme such as this/the future of thought and aesthetic thought in particular/is here treated by Gianni Vattimo in terms of his own theoretical perspective in the first of the six essays included in the present collection. The aim of this collection as a whole is to function as a 'reader' along the pathways of Italian aesthetics in this century.

Aesthetics in Italy/in so far as one can speak of it as an historical subject endowed with its own overall philosophical identity-seems at present to be going through a vital transitional phase. Open to the most prominent trends in European and, to a lesser degree, Anglo-American thought, the twentieth century tradition in Italy is in point of fact the result of a variety of local trends and 'currents' which have been consolidated around certain major thinkers and masters. Aesthetic research centres are today active at the universities of Turin, Pavia, Milan, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Siena, Rome, Salerno, Bari, Cagliari and Palermo. Journals, publishing houses, group projects, and the *Associazione Italiana per gli Studi di Estetica* (AISE) (Italian Society for Aesthetic Studies), founded in 1984 try to ensure that this variegated complex is kept together. In 1990 two conferences, the first at the University of Salerno and the Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies in Naples[3], and, the second at the University of Siena[4], called together

the entire academic community, and in the case of Siena, in two of the three working days, comparison and discussion extended to scholars from three continents (Europe, North America and Eastern Asia)., who were invited to illustrate the major trends in twentieth century aesthetics in their respective countries. Considered globally, the two initiatives favoured a constructive stocktaking of the recent history of Italian aesthetics. The aim of this survey is to highlight certain milestones in that history.

The theory of art in Italian idealism and the De Sanctis-Croce line set beside the modern, are the themes around which Stefano Zecchi and Aldo Trione, thinkers who would hardly call themselves Crocean, shape their own original interpretation of Croce's legacy, and its influences in spheres allied to aesthetics: poetic and literary criticism., as well as the strong trace left by the idealist movement in a vast stratum of Italian culture and society.

What the Italian Marxist oriented intelligentsia owes to the seminal influence of Antonio Gramsci is the basic theme of the survey by Stefano Benassi of the University of Bologna. This survey starts from Gramsci, to widen out into a consideration of the influence of Husserl's phenomenology on a pleiad of notable thinkers., Antonio Banfi, Luciano Anceschi, Enzo Paci, Dino Formaggio and the new generation of scholars in Milan and Bologna. The opening up to structuralism and the impetus to semiotics that Umberto Eco has given, in the season preceding his activity as a world-famous novelist, complete Benassi's analytic and historical survey. The essay by Luisa Bonesio of the University of Pavia in its turn poses an important question. Beside the new generation of aesthetologists, deftly surveyed by the author, who is, for that matter, one of their number, is there, Bonesio asks, a 'generation' of new ideas and perspectives -in other words and opening towards extra-European cultural horizons on the part of a minority of scholars emerging today? And what in recent years have been the first fruits of the comparative enquiry in aesthetics? Bonesio is kind enough to mention my own contribution over the last twenty years to this type of enquiry and to the knowledge of Far-Eastern aesthetics. The initial intellectual solitude surrounding my first work as a comparatist, on my return from a formative period in India at the Tagore University of Shantiniketan[5] has been broken only in very recent years, thanks not least to the interest taken by Italian cultured society in Eastern philosophies and arts, and religions, But the integration of Oriental studies in the aesthetic academic community remains, for the time being, an unsolved problem. The first person to call attention to this problem was Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984), the eminent scholar, well-known and loved in India, Tibet and the whole of Eastern Asia. Tucci has the unquestionable merit of having renewed and developed Oriental studies in Italy, not least through the research activities of the *Istituto*

per il Medio e Estremo Oriente (ISMEO), which he founded in Rome in 1931, and directed with extraordinary energy and abnegation, before entrusting it to a group of scholars of his Roman school[6].

"Up until a few years ago," wrote Tucci in the now distant 1934, " the Orient was almost ignored in the official programme of our culture. The history of philosophy began with the pre-Socratics; political history with the Egyptians and Assyrians, by virtue of their relations with the Mediterranean and Biblical world. Convinced that we were ourselves the inventors both of history and of science, we Westerners refused to consider a large part of mankind until it had started to have dealings with us..... A serious error, since modern research has detected neglected threads that , from remote times, link the most distant countries of the East with those of the West"[7].

Unfortunately, our university studies have not encouraged an organic cultural vision. " Pure philology has been too dominant in our studies," observed Tucci. remarking that " the time has come to consider them no longer as ends in themselves.... University teaching, as it regards the East, must be modernized, and become the vehicle of intimate understanding of the fundamental aspects of the culture being studied"[8].

An enormous job needs to be done in the field of comparative aesthetics in the direction indicated by Tucci. The survey recently carried out in Japan by Sasaki ken-ichi, in which Japanese and Western aesthetologists answered a questionnaire with a list of basic aesthetic concepts, highlighted, in Sasaki's words., that there exists today a repertory of basic concepts commonly recognized[9]. But, on the other hand, Sasaki drew attention to the fact that " the Japanese aesthetics in question is not a traditional one based on Japanese culture as such, but one based on Western philosophy"[10]. And this is another aspect or, rather, a damaging counter-effect of the mutual isolation of the aesthetic traditions of East and West. When a hundred and twenty years ago Japan opened its doors to the West, the European and Anglo-American models were adopted indiscriminately, to the serious detriment of the vitality of local traditions.

Local but not marginal, in being the living limbs of a speculative *ecumene* that knows no frontiers, the aesthetic traditions today need to be saved and strengthened in the place and language in which they historically took root, but also in a creative and illuminating comparison with one another. To Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, the Anglo-Sinhalese thinker to whom India and the East are indebted for a formidable contribution, of learning and insight, I have devoted the brief profile[11]. which closes this review of aesthetic studies in Italy. In these

studies the critical reception of Coomaraswamy's thought is today an important factor[12].

Notes And References

1. See his *The End of Modernity*, Oxford: Polity, 1989, reviewed at length by Brian Rotman in the *TLS* April 7-13, 1989.
2. I particularly have in mind Peter Mc Cormick's remarkable speculations on Modernity, *Aesthetics, and the Bounds of Art* in his book of that title, Cornell Univ. Press 1990; the ample discussions in the textbok on *Postmodernism* (Thomas Docherty ed., Harvester Wheatsheaf 1992); and the analyses by Zhou Ping and Fei xingpei on *The Making of Modernist Art in China*, which these two scholars from Sichuan brilliantly rendered in the context of the XII International Conference on *La Modernidad como Estetica* organized by the 'Instituto de Estetica y Teoria de las Artes' in Madrid, September 1992.
3. Organized on the theme of *Twentieth Centuruy Italian Aesthetics* by Aldo Trione, the author of one of the two essays on Italian idealism included in this volume.
4 Organized by the present author on the theme of *The Major Trends in 20th Century Aesthetics*. The trilingual collection of the proceedings (Guerini e Associati, Milan 1991) includes a chapter from Ananta Charana Sukla's book *The Concept of Imitation in Greek and Indian Aesthetics*, Rupa & Co., Calcutta, 1977.

Among the reviews of the Siena conference mention should be made of Michael Mitias's ' International Conference on the Major Trends in Twentieth-Century Aesthetics' in *The American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter*, Vol.10, no.4, Fall 1990.

5. I briefly mention this experience in the introduction to the book cited in the previous note.
6 Among those who have achieved eminence in the field of Indian studies are Raniero Gnoli, Luciano Petech and Corrado Pensa. The specialist in Iranian studies Gherardo Gnoli is the current President of Is MEO (' Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East').
7. G. Tucci, *L'Oriente nella cultura contemporanea*, Istituto Italiano per il Medio e Estremo Oriente, Rome 1934.
8. Ibid., p.11.

9. Ken-ichi Sasaki, 'Report Concerning a 'Research Questionnaire on the Fundamental Concepts in Aesthetics' *JTLA* (Journal of the Faculty of Letters, The University of Tokyo, (Aesthetics), Vol.16 (1991).

10. I examine this question in the section entitled ' A Letter from Japan' in the Introduction , cited above, to *The Major Trends in Twentieth Century Aesthectics.*

11. A much shortened version of this text, entitled 'La voie de l' Occident et la voie de l 'Orient', is in *Pourquoi l ' Esthetique, Hommage a Mikel Dufrenne,* Editions Jean Michel Place, Paris (21,1992).

12. *La ricezione critica in Italia di Ananda K. Coomaraswamy* by Francesco Solitario, Prometheus Edizioni, Milan 1992, with an accurate bibliography, is a welcome contribution to this new line of comparative aesthetic reserarch in Italy.

On the Challenge of Art to Philosophy: Aesthetics at the End of Epistemology *

GIANNI VATTIMO

Is there a visible sense in which art represents today a challenge to philosophy, more specifically and strongly than at any other time in our history? This challenge seems to have existed in every period of the history of our western culture, from ancient Greece onward. I nevertheless think that in our epoch this " eternal" challenge has assumed specific traits. To recognize this fact- if it is such- means also to proceed a step forward in the position and discussion of our problem. In fact, if we recognize that in our time the challenge of art to philosophy is taking place in new and specific forms, we shall have to recognize also the profound transformation undergone by philosophy itself. All this means that there is no "eternal" or natural essence of philosophy and art, which by nature would be opposed to each other. To put it in Heideggerian terms: art and philosophy, like any other sphere of activity, or kind of being, have an essence only in the verbal sense of the German word *Wesen*: each one *West* such and such a thing at this particular moment of the history of Being. Now, the change in the meaning of "essence" which is marked by *Wesen is* exactly the transformation of philosophy in relation to which we are trying to re-think the position of works of art. It may be interesting here to recall that the first essay in which Heidegger develops his idea of the "history of being", of a possible plurality of *Welten*, is precisely the essay *On the Origin of the Work of Art*[1] ; at least, in one of the decisive thinkers of our century, the discovery of the verbal- historical, eventual meaning of "essence" takes place in connection with the reflection on art. Let me try to summarize a first hypothesis : the challenge of art to philosophy, no matter which sense it had in previous epochs within our tradition, takes place today in a situation marked by the transformation of philosophy; this transformation, I maintain, is describable in terms of the "eventuality" of being and of the "verbal" meaning of *Wesen* developed by Heidegger in his late writings.

This same situation, leaving aside for a while the "vagaries" of the philosopher of the Black Forest, can also be described in other terms: those of Richard Rorty's book on *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979)[2]. Rorty's thesis, very roughly summarized, is that the transformation of philosophy with which we are confronted today is the end of its "epistemological" form, the end of philosophy thought of in terms of epistemology. This most recent form of philosophy was the last echo of the *Prote philosophia* which Aristotle had put

at the basis of all human knowledge. *Prote philosophia* meant to Aristotle a knowledge which catches the totality of being by catching the first and most general causes and principles (and Nietzsche called it "the main"). In modern times, no specific field of being, as the first principles or causes, is left for philosophy; philosophy, therefore, has tried to keep its supremacy by means of the "Critical" analysis of knowledge as such, transforming itself into epistemology and methodology. But also this last disguise of metaphysics has undergone a crisis in contemporary thought, for reasons and in forms that I do not want to (and cannot) analyze here. This crisis has also involved that part of philosophy which, under the name of aesthetics inaugurated in its present sense by Kant, had imagined its task as that of describing the "conditions of possibility" of the experience of art and beauty. Aesthetics too, at least in a large part of its modern development, has been a sort of "epistemology" or methodology of art and beauty. Almost all of the texts on which aestheticians were educated and still work (except, of course, Hegel's *Aesthetics*) are methodological and epistemological: under the dominating influence of neo-Kantianism of the late 19th and early 20th century, what aestheticians generally discuss is the problem of defining the specific traits of aesthetic experience.

As I said, I am not trying to discuss here the reasons and meaning of the end (if it is, as I believe., an end) of the epistemological determination (*Bestimmung*:: vocation, definition, configuration.) of philosophy. In the field of aesthetics, the end of epistemology is not the mere consequence of what has happened in the rest of philosophy; it has some specific characteristics which I shall try to analyze, in order to understand the meaning of art's challenge to philosophy, and the possible task of philosophical esthetics in this situation.

The end of epistemology in aesthetics, in our century, is deeply related to the experience of the historical avant-garde of the beginning of this century with all its consequences until now (until Postmodernism). It was avant-garde which violently challenged the tranquil certainty of philosophical aesthetics at the beginning of the 20th century. While academic philosophers (like the German neo-Kantians and phenomenologists, the Italian neo-idealists, but also realists and pragmatists like Dewey) engaged in defining aesthetic experience, which was generally thought of in terms of Kantian disinterestedness, avant-garde art conceived of itself as a full experience of truth: this is the case, in different senses, of Futurism and Surrealism, Expressionism and Dada, and of the poetics of political engagement (Brecht), as of the "abstract art"" of Klee and Kandinsky. Poets and artists refused to accept the "insulation" in which philosophical aesthetics, and social conventions too, confined them.

I am perfectly aware of the risks involved in proposing a general interpretation of the meaning of the artistic avant-garde of the beginning of this century. But Ernst Bloch, *si licet parva...*, did just this, in one of his first , illuminating works *Geist der Utopie* (1918 and 1923)[3], which is one of the sources of the *kritische Theorie* of the Frankfurt School. What Bloch, himself strongly influenced by expressionism, called the self-assertion of the rights of the spirit, and the emerging of the "Gothic" assertion of the rights of the spirit, and the emerging of the "Gothic" essence of art, can also be called, less emphatically, the claim of art to represent an experience of truth. Artists who claimed that automatic writing *(ecriture automatique)* revealed the depth of inner life; artists who wanted to catch objects in movement, in an epoch in which the whole world was put into a general movement, by the spread of technology; artists who looked at the forms of the objects of the so-called primitive cultures in order to find more essential ways of representing our own reality; and again artists who, by the very nature of the "products" they exhibited as a work of art (*Duchamp's Fountain*) obliged people to re-examine all their pre-conceptions of art and of its social framework-- all these artists could not conceive of themselves as being engaged in a " disinterested " activity; they felt deeply committed to an experience of truth.

I do not intend to discuss whether or not this is still the atmosphere in today's art; certainly not, from various points of view, as post-modernism can be understood as the "claim of art to truth", provided that we develop all the consequences which, for the notion of truth itself, are implicit in the avant -grade experience. I mean that the challenge of avant-garde art to (academic) philosophy of the beginning of this century was a challenge to a specific notion of truth, which-- as Gadamer above all has shown in *Truth and Method* saw it merely in terms of art, philosophy had to revise its "scientific" notion of truth.

We can, I think , describe the situation of philosophy after the fall of its epistemological *Bestimmung* in terms of Dilthey's essay *on the Essence of Philosophy*, 1907[4]. Dilthey thinks that his, and also our, position in philosophy is characterized by accomplished dissolution of both the ancient idea of metaphysics (Aristotle's *prote philosophia*) and the modern one (metaphysics in Cartesian and Kantian terms: self-evidence of reason as the basis for all truth). As Dilthey has a sort of cyclical view of the history of philosophy, what is happening in our epoch is analogous, for him, to what happened at other moments of the dissolution of metaphysical systems, like late antiquity and the end of the Middle Ages. As in those epochs, in ours too, philosophy, having left its systematic structure, tends to become what Dilthey calls *Lebensphilosophie*, philosophy of life -- which has nothing to do with the sort of vitalistic metaphysics usually denoted by this

term,but is simply a kind of thought intimately related to "lived experience", and -- this is important -- which expresses itself in literary and artistic forms rather than in the form of scientific demonstrations. Dilthey retraces the origin of this current in Schopenhauer (who is, incidentally, one of the inspirers of his own interpretation of Kant), and sees its developments in authors such as Ruskin and Emerson, Nietzsche, Tolstoy and Maeterlinck. In other works of these "poet-philosophers", says Dilthey, "the methodological claims to universal validity and foundation weaken, while the process which, from the experience of life, draws an interpretation of it, takes on ever freer forms "; so that life "receives an explanation in the form of apercus unmethodical but full of "impressivity" (eindrucksvoll)"[5]. It is this kind of thought, says Dilthey, "which represents the center of the interests of the new generation". Within the global context of Dilthey's essay, this form of philosophy is considered as a provisional one, which should prepare a new, more powerful and logically rigorous, form of philosophy. But if one considers the themes of this essay in connection with the numerous problems Dilthey left open in his work, and the final incomplete state of many of his writings, a reasonable hypothesis might be this: although Dilthey strove to build a "systematic" philosophy, in the form of a transcendental psychology of the *Weltanschauungen*, i.e. of all possible apercus which build different philosophies around a specific interpretation of life, he never succeeded in persuading himself and his readers that this philosophy was really better than the poetic, unmethodical expression of *Erlebnisse*, which so much interested his contemporaries. One of the reasons for the incompleteness of so many of Dilthey's works is, in my view, the difficulty he found in defining this ideal of a systematic philosophy once he had recognized that the metaphysical essence of philosophy was no longer a practicable path. The sometimes enthusiastic description he gives, in *The Essence of Philosophy*, of the *Lebensphilosophie*, which he considers characteristic of his epoch (preferring it, one should note, to other possible references) shows that he was, at least, deeply divided as to the evaluation of the task of philosophy.

Dilthey's essay on the essence of philosophy can help to understand, perhaps in a less "prophetic" but a more useful way, the sense of the dialogue between poetry and thought, which Heidegger considers a sort of destiny of philosophy at the moment of the end of metaphysics. Let us not forget that the connection of Heidegger's work to Dilthey's is very substantial: Heidegger says in a page of *Sein und Zeit* that, in his own researches, he only wants "to develop and enlarge the views of Dilthey and to favour their assimilation by the present generation, which has not yet assimilated them" (paragraph 72). What I am suggesting is that we can improve our understanding of Heidegger's idea of

Gesprach between thinking and poetry by referring it to Dilthey's notion of *Lebensphilosophie*. Of course Heidegger is a severe critic of any reduction of philosophy to *Weltanschauunq* and to the expression of Erlebnisse; no one doubts this. But - the more he develops, after *Sein und Zeit*, the consciousness of the destiny of metaphysics and of the problem of its *Ueberwindung*, the more too he develops a conception and practice of philosophy as dialogue with poetry (and not in order to build a "system of *Weltanschauungen*", as Dilthey still believed, but in order to expose himself to the experience of the truth which speaks in poetry...). What I want to emphasize is that Heidegger's interest, as philosopher, in poetry was not at all the interest of an "aesthetician", in the "epistemological" sense of the word; nor the interest which, at least problematically, was Dilthey's, i.e. of a thinker who hoped to build a sort of system out of "the given" of the poetical views of the world. His interest, rather, may be described as a *dialogical* one. What is involved in Heidegger's notion of a dialogue between philosophy and poetry is that they speak as partners, and poetry is no longer an "object" to philosophy. This dialogue, I suggest, is possible only at the end of metaphysics, and is the only way given to philosophy at the moment in which it is no longer conceivable as epistemology.

Among the many questions which remain open at this point, I shall try to discuss the following three: a) Why should philosophy be a dialogue with poetry and not, or rather at the same time, with the sciences? b) What kind of truth can be found in poetry and art? c) Should philosophy merge completely into poetry and art; and if not, why? -- as one can see, these questions arise directly from what I have been maintaining above, and can be taken as introducing possible alternative conclusions.

To come, then to the first question: why should the only way out for philosophy at the end of metaphysics be the dialogue with poetry instead of that -- preferred by positivists -- with science, be it the natural sciences or the human sciences? I don't think that Heidegger's position on this point is inspired by a generic preference for the humanities, for the humanistic tradition and so on. As one can also see in the essay on Dilthey, the end of the metaphysical dream, which was also a dream of *objectivity*, orientates philosophy towards a dialogue with what Hegel called the forms of absolute spirit. At the moment in which it is no longer conceivable as the knowledge of a specifical field of reality (the first principles) or as a foundational metaknowledge (epistemology, methodology, analysis of language, etc.) philosophy has to recognize its kinship with the forms of the interpretation of the world -- then, in a very broad sense, with *Weltanschauung* -- and cannot try to recover its metaphysical, i.e. objective, cognitive, content *via* a privileged dialogue with the sciences. Not, at least , until the "aesthetic"

character of the sciences themselves is not made completely explicit; it is clear by now that after Kuhn and Feyerabend, the sciences have become more and more "aesthetic", forms of interpretation and not (or not only by this means) forms of "knowledge" in the positivist sense of the word. At this point, which is mine and not Heidegger's, it is possible for science to become also a dialogue -partner for philosophy. This is , in my view, the ultimate sense of the difference between epistemology and hermeneutics proposed by Rorty: it is no longer a difference between knowledge and interpretation, but rather between two kinds of interpretation, normal and revolutionary (in the terminology Rorty borrows from Kuhn). The essence of poetry, wrote Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, is *Dichtung*, invention; philosophy, then, can choose its partner "poetry" wherever it finds Dichtung, invention; and consequently in "revolutionary" science as well.

The two final questions (final for this paper) these are, as usual, the most difficult and, in my view, meaningful. If we assume that, at the moment of the final dissolution of metaphysics, the only chances remaining open to philosophy is to expose itself to the truth which is experienced in poetry and art, what kind of truth may we expect to *find* -- or better, to experience -- in this dialogue? As I noted above, while speaking of Gadamer when philosophy admits the very possibility of an experience of truth off the path marked by scientific methodology, the way is open for a re-definition of truth itself. It is not only a question of names, which could be dissolved by stipulating that we call truth only propositions that have been verified (or not falsified, given the possibility of that occurring) by controlled scientific experiences. Artists will nevertheless continue to call their experience "truth", indicating by this a relation which philosophy, obedient to the stipulation I mentioned, would simply leave aside, with a completely "unscientific" *escamotage* ... I think it is more constructive for thought to consider the double meaning of truth which Heidegger discusses in *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*. In that lecture Heidegger opposes truth *qua orthothes* or *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, i.e. the proposition that pictures the state of affairs, to truth *qua* openness, freedom, i..e the opening of a horizon within which *res* and *intellectus* can relate and can be compared in order to control the correspondence of the proposition to the state of affairs. Heidegger thinks that truth as correspondence is made possible only by truth as openness; we can call a proposition true or false only by the application of a set of rules which can be called true or false in the same sense, but are given to us with our *Dasein*; and which are radically historical, in the sense that they are not a "structural", Kantian *a priori* of human reason.

When Heidegger speaks of the work of art as *ins Werk setzen der Wahrheit* (the putting of truth into the work) he unquestionably has in mind truth in the sense of openness. But it seems, then , that we are back here at a notion of truth as *Weltanschauung*, as a general "view " of the world, vague and pervasive, within which other more specific truths, in the propositional sense of the word, become visible. Such a reduction of truth to *Weltanschauung* cannot easily be attributed to Heidegger, because he is much more radical than Dilthey: for him, there is no "objective" view of the world compared too which poetry would be "only" *Weltanschauung*. Nevertheless, although Heidegger never considered his dialogue with poetry, to which he dedicated too much of his meditation in the late years, as a reduction of philosophy to the level of *Erlebnis* and *Weltanschauung*. what remains of his *Gesprach* with poets such as *Holderlin*, Rilke, George, Trakl, but also Sophocles, is not a set of philosophical propositions. The question : what truths, ultimately, did Heidegger find in poets? is unanswerable. Unanswerable too, in my view , is the question concerning the results of the application of a Heideggerian "method" (and the word here required many quotation marks) in the field of literary and art criticism. In poetry there is no truth which can be put into the form of a proposition. The truth which is at work in poetry is the *background* truth which Heidegger distinguishes from the *adaequatio* in *Vom Wesen der Warheit*. We can say: the truth of an atmosphere, of a sound in the air, of a shared prejudice, of an *intermittence du coeur;* the truth of Proust's *madeleine*. We can call it truth because it de-termines, *be-stimmt* (gives tune and voice, also) to our experience in a sense which is deeper and more pervasive than the sense of the specific "truths" we are faced with within the world. In a certain way, this is a *weak* notion of truth -- which could refer to a beautiful page of Heidegger at the end of the lecture on *Das Ding*[6], where he speaks of the ring of the world and of the *Ge-ring*, the marginal, poor etc. To point it out might help us to read Heidegger in a less "romantic" and emphatic way than we usually do. This, I admit, is something that may be interesting only for Heidegger's readers. Be that as it may; but the *weakening* of the notion of truth is probably a more general problem. At the moment of the dissolution of its metaphysical *Wesen*, philosophy experiences a sort of new kinship with poetry: it is the *Lebensphilosophie* of which Dilthey spoke. This experience, once Heidegger has radicalized Dilthey by dissolving the metaphysical element remaining in his theories, leads to the discovery of the background essence of truth. It is truth as background that is at work in works of art. Only on the basis of this notion of truth can art become a challenge to philosophy.

This leads us to a concluding question, which was also Dilthey's problem: if philosophy is no longer metaphysics, neither in the classical nor in the Kantian,

epistemological sense and truth reveals itself to be more "background" than thesis and propositions, why does not philosophy merge completely into poetry? Does philosophy still possess a specific characteristics, on the basis of which the *Gesprach* between *Denken* and *Dichten can* still have a sense?

I don't have -- and neither, I think , does Heidegger -- any answer to this question; except, perhaps, some negative hints, which can also be taken as the mere description of the present situation. Philosophy cannot simply merge into poetry because both poetry and philosophy are *still* defined in terms in which the metaphysical has *be -stimmt* (defined and determined) them. A merging of philosophy into poetry would only mean, in these conditions, a reversal, with philosophy assuming the limits of its "counterpart" (*Weltanschauung* instead of system) without any transformation of the "essence", the *Wesen.* Dialogue, *Gesprach,* means both more and less than this : less, because each of the partners remains faithful, sticks to its own specific and technical tradition (philosophy thus remaining an argumentative form of discourse, with its own vocabulary, syntax and rhetorics); and more, because what is at stake in the dialogue is precisely the re - examination (de-and re- construction?) of the inherited *Wesen* of both philosophy and poetry, and of the very notion of truth, which through the dialogue of philosophy and poetry begins to lose its metaphysical traits.

Notes and References

* This text was presented, in a slightly different version, to the International Congress of Aesthetics held in Montreal in Summer 1984; and has been included in the proceedings of that Congress.

(1) 'The Origin of the Work of Art' is an essay of 1936, published in Heidegger's *Holzwege,* Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1950.

(2) Cf. R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Prienceton, Princeton University Press, 1979.

(3) E. Bloch, *Geist der Utopie (Erste Fassung, 1918),* Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1971.

(4) The essay on 'The Essence of Philosophy' (Das Wesen der philosophie) was published in volume V of W. Dilthey's Gesammelte Schriften, Tubingen, Mohr (1914-36), pp. 339-416.

(5) Cf. *'Das Wesen der Philosophie'*, cit., part II, sect.III

(6) Cf. *'Das Ding'* in M. Heidegger, *Vortraege und Aufsaetze,* Pfullingen Neske, 1954.

The Theory of Art in Italian Idealism

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Italian idealism has found its widest audience in the middle and popular strata of society: in the high schools, on the arts pages of newspapers and in other information media, with contributions of literary criticism, the interpretation of artistic events and work concerned with providing bearings for those wishing to understand aesthetic phenomena in general. It has been this sort of presence in Italian society that has made the philosophy of idealism (and particularly of the philosophers Croce and Gentile) a ground of cultural recognition, and often of national identity, for many intellectuals, teachers and professional people. A discussion of the theory of art in Italian idealism necessarily involves speaking of this aspect as well, that is, of the reasons for the diffusion of aesthetic conceptions that have built a vocabulary used and diffused in widely diverse social strata.

I find myself therefore with the task of chalking out the boundaries of my analysis, examining the problem in its mainly theoretical aspects, but also with the wish to let the reader glimpse, or perhaps just surmise, the reasons why the aesthetic vocabulary of Italian idealism has been so widely assimilated.

I shall first of all consider the significance of Croce's linguistics, and shall then take this theme within a fundamental problem of aesthetics at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one: the question of the death of art. In this context, with regard to the Italian situation, besides Croce, I shall refer to Francesco De Sanctis and Angelo Camillo De Meis. Finally I shall examine how the thematic nucleus of the idealistic "death of art" (with all this implies for the interpretation of artistic phenomena) recurs with the *same theoretical value* in Antonio Gramsci's conception of art and, more generally, in his discussion of the function of culture.

1. Modern linguistics is based on the Saussurian concept of *langue*, and this is the starting point for Saussure's analyses, which at times take widely divergent paths on individual questions, as they do on general research perspectives. However, it is always *langue*, not *parole*, which is the object of reflection. Croce's linguistics, on the contrary, takes theoretical fundamentality away from *Langue*, shifting it to *parole*. Thus emphasis is laid on the irrepeatability of the linguistic act and the sense of the uniqueness of the form of expression assumes a privileged position. For Croce the unique and irrepeatable character of the linguistic act derives from the universal category, art- intuition. It is

worth mentioning that if this idealist thesis regarding the problem of language emarginates Croce's position from the lines of development of modern linguistics, it has nevertheless been well- received, in its general and overall aspects, by several North American philosophers and literary critics, belonging to so-called "textualism". These are Hillis Miller, Paul De Man, Geoffrey Hartmann and Harold Bloom, who maintain that the determination of a problem is always relative to a particular aspect of language, namely the choice of the use of a certain word rather than another, of a word bearing one particular connotation rather than another. Taking this point of view as a starting point, analogous to idealism is the textualists' position with respect to science. The scientific model is, they claim, not a model of knowledge. The scientist puts together a vocabulary which is only one among many possible ones, and uses it to predict and control natural dynamics. It is a vocabulary that works very well for this purpose: scientific research is nothing other than putting together in the most coherent form a series of words and constructing a text. It is therefore literature - which avails itself of the uniqueness and irrepeatability of the word as essential and absolute form for any expression and communication which receives from the textualists (on the basis of the theses of idealist "linguistics") the central position in a cultural scheme that re-defines science and other forms of knowledge as literary *genres*.

Crocean linguistic contains the premises of American textualism and the elements of "transgression" that lead from the traditional prominence of *langue* to the ontological priority of *parole*. Language is in Croce's view not a means of perception or the form of a judgement, but expresses the act of the intuitive consciousness of reality.Language can fulfil this function if one has a generalizing and categorial view of language, indifferent to the diversity of expressive forms. In this sense both the differences between individual arts and the differences between genres are ignored. For Croce genres like the "tragic", the "comic" and the "sublime" are pseudo-concepts with which aesthetics need not concern itself.

The intuitional and irrepeatable aspect of the linguistic act inevitably involves the abolition of genres: on this theoretical basis the textualists, and Harold Bloom in particular, reassess romantic thought, giving second place however to what seems to me the most important problem, the theory of the symbolic and the argument that distinguishes symbol from allegory.

To get a better cultural picture of the intuitional aspect of the Crocean linguistic act in its unique and non-repeatable form, we need to recall the thesis of "pure visibility", put forward by Fiedler in *Die Ursprung der künstlerische Tatigkeit*, a text that had considerable influence on Crocean aesthetics. Fiedler's

thesis affirms that there exists a world of absolutely original forms which are not static or definite, but in movement in a continuous process of transformation: Knowledge of these forms cannot be acquired by the language that we commonly use to talk about things that are happening and to communicate habitual perceptions to each other: to understand them we need to possess a special language which is neither known nor available to all: the language of art.

In this perspective one thus reaches the stage in aesthetics of identifying art and, therefore, of considering under the general category of expressiveness language as much as art. Thus Croce was able to affirm that the subject of aesthetics is not language in general , but "language in its essence, language in so far as it is expression" (1) The possibility of reaching the essential form of language - which was for Croce expression - involves a process of excluding anything that might be further definition or specification of the language itself. It is thus a question of establishing that distinct classes of expression do not exist and that the essential reality of expression is the essential reality of language.

The Crocean identification of art and language cannot then take place on the empirical plane, because the same form of consciousness acts in language as in art, because language and art are the same transcendental form of consciousness.

Everything that does not lie within the essential form of language is classed by Croce as practical activity. For example, the sign is external to the essentiality of language. The sign is the product of praxis: "signs," says Croce," are expedients and practical means of calling up things or facts and , as it were, of drawing them". Thus, to return to Saussure's distinction, we may say that for Croce only *parole* has significance and is language in the real sense, since it is through *parole* that the living and irreducible unity of the sentence is expressed.

In a letter to Vossler (29-9-1904), in which he comments on the latter's book *Sprache als Schopfung und Entwicklung*, Croce stressed two directions that can be followed in order to understand the structure and function of language: the first regards the aesthetic study of the word, that is "the word incarnate, concrete and real language, and thus the aesthetic rules, but also literary genres. It should by now be clear that for Croce the first approach is the fundamental one on which aesthetic theory is constructed; this is funded on the identity of intuition and expression, and thus, according to what was said earlier concerning the expression -language relationship, on the relation of equivalence between intuition, expression and art. This relationship relegates to a subordinate position the exterior character of expression, that is, the externalization of form and, in effect, the way in which a work of art is structured technically, while giving central status in the aesthetic -philosophical enquiry to the problem of artistic

production as interior event. Let us now consider this aspect and distinguish its implications for the general evaluation of the process of artistic production and the theoretical prominence it assumes.

2. Croce charts the process of aesthetic production in four moments : " a) impressions; b) expression or aesthetic spiritual synthesis; c) hedonistic accompaniment or pleasure in the beautiful (aesthetic pleasure); d) translation of the aesthetic event into physical phenomena (Sounds, tones, movements, combinations of lines and colors etc.)" (4) of this process, the second point is in Croce's view the only one that really regards aesthetics, in that it is a philosophical problem.

If we now consider the entire aesthetic process described in the four points mentioned above, and keep in mind the absolute primacy that Croce ascribes to point b, we can see that at the basis of Crocean aesthetics a constant is always, as a distinct feature, the primacy of the aesthetic over she artistic moment, that is of the aesthetic moment -as intuitive state and ground of interiority -over the artistic moment, namely art in its structure and historical reality. All Croce's aesthetics. considered also in their subsequent modified forms, will always maintain this theoretical basis, so that when he wishes to explain the artistic phenomenon according to these aesthetic premises, what he always finds himself doing is explaining the subjective, interior and intuitive moment of the aesthetic spirit.

An example of this is the way in which Croce distinguishes the beautiful from the ugly. The "beautiful" is successful expression: it thus follows that the "ugly" is *un*successful expression. Both the beautiful and the ugly belong to expression; we should note therefore that the ugly exists in the same orbit as the beautiful: namely, expression. The most significant consequence of this thesis is that, if one claims the identity of intuition and expression, if art is the form of this identity, if the ugly is unsuccessful expression (and thus *not* art), one must therefore maintain that at times intuition is not always expression and that it can indeed lead to the negation of expression. By definition, expression should always be intuition organised esthetically; the presence of the ugly makes it clear that at times there fails to occur an identity of intuition and expression. This coincidence might be admitted only under the profile of an ideal absolute perfection of the artistic form, but it fails to occur as soon as aesthetic reflection, rather than basing itself on a normative premise, proceeds from the historical, finished reality of the work of art.

We might observe that the beautiful, considered as the category that determines the sphere of art, is in fact a form of intuition which establishes a normative and absolute aesthetic judgment, but which says nothing about the concreteness of the work of art or the variety of styles.

This is a characteristic of all neo-idealist trends which give pride of place to a normative aesthetic system over the reading of the artistic phenomenon, conditioning and, to some degree, predetermining aesthetic reflection on the reality of a work of art. Try and substitute the Crocean "beautiful", the quality determining the artistic, with other interpretative concepts, such as Lukács' "bourgeois decadence" or Gramsci's pedagogic function of art for the constitution of the national political identity, and you will see that, in the name of an ideal and normative vision of aesthetics, one always loses there concreteness of the artistic phenomenon as such, and this results in serious, often banal misunderstandings of the effective main lines of European art and literature. On the theoretical plane the result of all this is the denial of the truth giving significance of the consciousness that one experiences through art, and thus an inevitable nihilism which does not admit the autonomy of the *poiein.*

Croce underrated the art growing around him: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Valery, Eliot are non-poetry. In 1918 he published an important aesthetic essay, *Carattere di totalita dell espressione artistica*, in which he defined the function of intuition, no longer intended as individual knowledge , but as a sentiment which has the character of totality; this different type of intuition Croce called lyrical intuition. Indeed in this work it is interesting to note the (apparently marginal) passage in which he defends himself from those who had wished to use his intuitionism for the purpose of understanding and explaining the "intuitionist fragmentarism" of the impressionists and of several expressionists. In this defence it seems clear that Croce wishes to disassociate his aesthetic from any possible type of interpretation of artistic phenomena, while showing at the same time that it has been thought out and constructed independently of the historical reality of art.

3. Together with the questions posed by Crocean aesthetics, they can be examined in terms of a central problem of neo-idealism, which yet involves a more general discourse on art in contemporary culture. This is the theme that commonly goes under the name of the "death of art" and which comprehends several concepts in Hegel's aesthetics. Present in it is the problem of the "Classical" and of the end of the "classical" in modernity; we get a glimpse of romantic aesthetics; we are given Hegel's judgement of it and the need for a renewed confrontation of our culture with romantic culture.

Croce translates the Hegelian expression *Auflosung* (dissolution, resolution) with "morte" and subsequently, "fine" in Italian. His translation gives a poor rendering of the German term, above all because the Italian words used by Croce give an advance setting and orientation to the problem in a direction which does not correctly reflect Hegel's. Hegel, Croce tells us, affirms "the mortality, indeed

the death which has already occurred in art"[5]. This reading of Hegel is based primarily on a radicalisation of the meaning of *Auflosung*, which deprives the term of its dialectical connotation, giving greater weight to its strictly empirical value: Gentile had already pointed out that Croce's interpretation of Hegel's aesthetic was based on an inadequate distinction between the empirical and the ideal event, which led him to identify the dialectical transcendence of art with the real end of artistic phenomena.

Croce's position seems in any case very explicit and leaves not a shadow of doubt about the sense that he attributes to the "morte" or "fine" of art. In his essay on Hegel he states too that for the German philosopher, "when philosophy has completed its work, art must disappear, because it is superfluous: art must die; indeed it is already well and truly dead"[6]. Not so much, therefore, the dialectical death of art, in the sense of an "eternal dying" which implies an "eternal rebirth", as other Hegelians, such as Bosanquet, tried to claim, but , says Croce, death "which has well and truly occurred; the death of art in the historical world"[7]. Art , for Hegel, is only a " philosophical error".

It can be said that though Hegel does not speak of the death but of the *Auflosung* of art, the idea of the transcending of the value of the truth of art (through religion and philosophy) is nevertheless essential in his system. A determining factor in his aesthetics is a discourse on the end of the "classical", as place where the truth of art is manifested, and thus the impossibility of a post-classical art which can conserve a sense of truth : thus Hegel interprets and takes a negative view of the breaking onto the scene of the subjectivism of the very aesthetics of Romanticism.

Nor does the position of Bosanquet, who in his well-known dispute with Croce maintained that one should not speak of the empirical and actual death of art, but rather of dialectical death, death as dying into truth, death as a prelude to the renewal and new self-expression of art[8], shift, for all that, the terms of the question. Neither the thesis of the empirical death of art, nor that of its dialectical death touches the centre of the Hegelian conception on the end of the formal perfection and of the absolute equilibrium of classical art, which results in the loss of the truth value of post-classical artistic form. This thesis, albeit indirectly, supports the nihilism typical of the present day which declares the death of *poiein*, which does not consider the possibility of the formal autonomy of a post-classical world, and which considers the *past* to be the fundamental temporal modality, the only one that provides awareness of the true, the beautiful, what is creatively possible and the very possibility of creating poetry. And on these bases it can be seen how all contemporary aesthetics (even that conventional

assimilation of concepts that do not have a correct theoretical foundation and that we use more or less unconsciously and banally when, for instance, we visit an art gallery) is Hegelian.

However, with the theme of the death of art Croce not only interpreted Hegelian thought, but intended to enter a lively debate about this problem, in which masters and friends of his, like De Sanctis and De Meis, had participated in the mid-nineteenth century.

A colleague of Carducci's at the University of Bologna, the Hegelian Angelo Camillo De Meis had raised the question of the death of art in his discussions with Spaventa, Imbriani and De Sanctis. For De Meis the death of art means the end of a specific form of artisticity, namely *poetry*. Poetry still belongs to the infancy of mankind and is destined to disappear with the growing up and coming of age of cultural life. Poetry dies so that scientific truth may be affirmed and thought no longer needs to express itself in mythical and metaphorical form. Strength, maturity, reflection, says De Meis, bring about the death of poetry; and the very modification of poetic form explains the evolution of thought towards the objective knowledge of reality. Indeed poetry, says De Meis, is, in its earliest expressions, religion, becoming in turn epic, then dramatic and finally lyric; in this progression we can see gradual detachment of poetry from imagination and its growing resemblance to those forms of rationalization which lead to its dissolution. Manzoni is witness to the death of poetry: his poetics testifies to the transition of the lyrical to historical, philosophical and scientific prose. Poetry no longer possesses " the infinity of art, the ideal , the divine"[9], these being replaced by reflection and the analytical spirit.

A determining presence of Vico's thought can be detected in the definition De Meis gives to the problem of the death of art: a presence found also in De Sanctis, in a cloudier form in Croce and not at all in Hegel, while in De Meis themes pertaining to Vico are re-interpreted from a positivist perspective. Imagination disappears when the world comes of age and, like religion, poetry too, which grows out of imagination, becomes an ingenuous and illusory form of the interpretation of life. Vico is thus re-read according to the spirit of positivism: "Real poetry, true art", De Meis asserts, "is by now science as the triumph of reason".[10]

In a letter to De Meis, De Sanctis wrote (20.3.1969) : Your ideas didn't surprise me: they are mine as well: we were breast-fed on them. But in you they are real ideas, with a clear and philosophical consciousness: in me they are semi-ideas, to use your language, and thus tentative and cloudy"[11]

The question of the death of art is, in fact, applied by De Sanctis with great critical wisdom to literary genres. The philosophical dimension that this problem can assume takes second place for him, becoming a question specifically linked to literary criticism and to the function of literature. Just as De Meis had spoken not of the death of art of poetry, significantly limiting the boundaries of the artistic, so De Sanctis does not declare the death of poetry but of one poetic genre: epics. And he adds: "Those who are against Goethe, Schiller, Byron and Leopardi, because they make, as they say, metaphysics in verse, strike me as being like those priests who get angry with philosophy and reason, repeating in chorus: 'Faith, Faith -Alas ! Faith is no more; poetry is dead, or to put it better, faith and poetry are immortal: what is gone is a particular way they had of being. Faith today springs from conviction, poetry is sparked by meditation: they are not dead, they are transformed"[12]

For De Sanctis the death of art or of poetry is an abstract formula which, if adhered to in its assertive dogmatism, precludes the possibility of understanding the specificity of the artistic phenomenon: certainly science and analytic thought have insinuated themselves into poetry, but this does not mean the end of poetry, rather the transformation of the genre, which remains alive alongside science and scientific knowledge. Thus De Sanctis observes that "formerly the poet was fired by enthusiasm, by sacred imaginings, and contemplated beauty; today he makes poetry about beauty, love, enthusiasm, genius, fancy, etc. It is the poet who turns his attention on himself and analyses himself and explains himself, having made himself into a critic and philosopher"[13]. Thus the end of one poetic genre and the transformation of the poetical: from epic to lyric poetry. The example of this is Leopardi.

In 1855 De Sanctis met Manzoni, who declared the non-poeticalness of Leopardi's poetry, exempting *All Italia* from this charge. In reply De Sanctis wrote an admirable essay on the *canzone* entitled *Alla sua donna*. Leopardi senses the end of the evocative greatness of poetry, and yet his verses continue to be an heroic witness to the necessity of poetry: "To this great Italian all that remains of poetry is bitter remembrance', and he laments its death in his life, in the world [.....]. But the poetry that is dead in his mind still lives in his heart [....]. Leopardi is no less a poet; the believer in him gets the better of the sceptic; poetry, crushed by and put to flight by science, finds shelter in his heart. Nor does the image die: it melts into the true and and is reborn beneath death, is reborn to die once more, a perpetual process of creation and destruction".[14]

Unlike De Meis, De Sanctis rejected the positivist influx and conditioning, and set the inexhaustible richness of life, of which art is the highest manifestation,

against forms of reflectiveness, which may very well explain and criticize the different expressions of existence, but which yet will never be able to regenerate life. In the inaugural lecture, *Science and Life*, for the academic year 1872-3 at the University of Naples, De Sanctis declared: "Science is growing at the expense of life. The more you give to thought , the more you take from action. You know life when it rushes past you [....]. Faith departs and philosophy is born. The twilight of art is the down of criticism. History ends and historians appear. Morality grows corrupts and moralists appear. The State goes to ruin, and there begins the science of the state"[15].

In an essay on Victor Hugo, De Sanctis reaffirmed the immortal spirit of poetry, as if it were the very essence of man's expressive faculty: immortal, like man; finite, like man. "Poetry is eternal, as faith, science, liberty, God are eternal. So first kill the heart and the imagination. Chase poetry from the Church, and she shines in the nation, and if she flees the nation, she repairs to the family, finds refuge in the fields. And if in the mouth of the French poet she evaporates, she is reborn in the mouth of the Polish or Magyar poet"[16].

Once again in reply to De Meis, De Sanctis acknowledged the dominant presence of science in contemporary culture, which had brought religion and art to the river-bed of analytic thought. But he did not accept the positivist radicalization of this situation, neither its definitive nor its ineluctable character: on the contrary, he maintained that when all was said, the proclaimed victory of scientific thought was no great boon to the history of mankind: "But I should add", so the letter to De Meis concludes, "that this form of thought is no impotent imbecile; if it has a history, the time will come when it, in its turn, will be Art and Religion".

4. In *Letteratura e vita nazionale* Gramsci explained his relationship with De Sanctis and why it was to him that one must look for the right way to establish the relation between art, art criticism and civil society: " The type of literary criticism specifically of the philosophy of practical action is offered by De Sanctis [.....] : it must fuse the struggle for the new culture, that is for a new humanism, the criticism of customs, of the sentiments and conceptions of the world, with aesthetic and purely artistic criticism in impassioned fervour, even if it be only in the form of sarcasm"[17].

Croce's introductory words to *La letteratura italiana nel sec. XIX* give Gramsci the opportunity to justify the link with De Sanctis's thought: " The direction," writes Croce, "which is now called historical materialism and which consists of conceiving historical events in their genesis and development from the simplest material elements, often finds in De Sanctis a non- doctrinaire representative"[18].

Gramsci's analysis of the artistic phenomenon, steered by Croce in the direction of De Sanctis, touches essentially on two points: a) the role of culture in national life; b) the role of intellectuals in national renewal. Gramsci does not discuss the theme of the death of art directly, but inherits the idealist implications of the problem. From Croce's perspective he finds himself denying the autonomy of the artistic phenomenon in itself, and from De Sanctis's perspective (where above all he gives primacy to the sociological aspect of literary criticism) he tends to see the dominant and constituent presence of social transformations in the construction of literary genres and in their variations and disappearances. The idealist conception of the death of art becomes for Gramsci the need to effect a total subordination of the artistic event to the pedagogic- political function that it is to fulfil.

Neither casual nor insignificant is Gramsci's sympathy for writers who question themselves in their work as to how to deal with the relation between literature and national life. Hence his interest in Alfredo Oriani, his interest in popular and easily digestible literary forms such as the serial story. For example, Gramsci insists on the need to defend Raffaele Giovanoli's *Spartaco*. once the grammatical errors have been eliminated and the work translated into correct Italian, precisely because in his view the creation of literature should take as its starting point the objective situation of popular culture, however poor or backward this maybe.

The idealist thesis of the death of art which has assumed in turn the senses of the end of art, the end of poetry and the falling into disuse of one type of poetic genre, now becomes the theorization of the fundamentality of a genre on the basis of the pedagogic function that it is able to fulfil. This means that to be deemed legitimate, any artistic activity and any artistic product must go through a "national" and "autocthonic" phase.

This is how Croce's aesthetics on the one hand, and on the other, Gramsci's position, which influenced so great a part of militant progressive criticism, were responsible for yet a further postponement of a considered and constructive encounter between our culture and the great culture of twentieth century Europe.

This idealist conception of art was followed up and radicalized in Togliatti and Alicata's post Resistance Italian Communist Party, which declared bourgeois- and therefore to be actively opposed- every thing that affirmed the autonomy of the artistic project and the artistic form. This was a cultural Stalinism which theorized *realism* as the heir to the national popular vision of Gramsci's aesthetic.

Notes and References

1. B. Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell ' espressione e linguistica generale,* Bari 1965 [11], p. 162.
2 B. Croce, *Letture di poeti,* Bari 1950, pp. 248-9.
3 Cf. T. De Mauro, 'Origine e sviluppo della linguistica crociana', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana,* 1954; and *Introduzione alla semantica,* Rome-Bari 1975, chapters IV and VII; see also P. D' Angelo's *L' estetica di Benedetto Croce,* Rome-Bari 1982.
4 Croce, *Estetica,* op. cit., p. 105.
5 *Ibid.* P. 336. D. Formaggio's pages are essential reading on the problem of the death of art, and have been my guide in the above considerations: cf. *L'idea di artisticita,* Milan 1962, new revised edition: *La "morte dell 'arte" e L 'Estetica,* Bologna 1983.
6 B. Croce, *Saggio sullo Hegel,* Bari 1927 (3), p. 89.
7 *Ibid.* p. 90.
8 Cf. B. Bosanquet, *Croce's Aesthetic,* "Proceeding of the British Academy", Vol. IX, 1914.
9 A.C. De Meis, *Dopo la laurea,* Bologna 1868, p. 331.
10 *Ibid.* part II, Bologna 1869, p.17.
11 *Carteggio ineito di Francesco De Sanctis,* ed. B. Croce, Naples 1915, p. 29.
12 F. De Sanctis, *'Alla sua donna'* , in *Saggi,* Bari 1965, vol. I, p. 267.
13 *Ibid.*
14 *Ibid.* pp. 271-72.
15 F. De Sanctis, *'La scienza e la vita',* in *Saggi,* op. cit., vol. III pp. 163-4.
16 F. De Sanctis, *Le "Contemplazioni"* , in Saggi, op. cit., vol. II, p.59.
17 A. Gramsci, *Letterature e vita nazionale,* Turin 1950, p. 7.
18 F. de Sanctis, *La letterature italiana nel sec XIX,* ed. B. Croce, Naples, P. xxvi
19 Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale,* cit. p. 134.

The De Sanctis: Croce line and the Problem of Modernity

ALDO TRIONE

1. There are moments in twentieth century Italian intellectual culture which need reappraising independently of certain "formulae" of one school or another, and of those tensions which have had a negative effect on the actual understanding of the facts of our culture.

The debates which - above all in the immediate post-war years- led to a sort of conflict that set a De Sanctis-Croce line against an aesthetics aligned on an unlikely De-Sanctis-Gramsci axis, today seem utterly remote to us; whereas there still seems to be a certain vitality in the numerous hypotheses proposed for poetics in the very same years (often in the idealist sphere). The " discovery" of semiotics and linguistics still seems topical, as does the great phenomenological studies with spiritualistic and metaphysical characteristics....

Some directions, certainly - and Marxism notable- today seem to be in decline. One even wonders whether they should not be considered moments to be consigned to the archaeology of knowledge, or whether they cannot be more usefully re-examined in a different frame of reference. This applies not only to methodological and historiographical questions, but to many theoretical points as well. And it is, indeed, with these questions in mind that I wish here to trace a path taken by Italian aesthetics along the De Sanctis-Croce line. It is a path that needs reappraising outside the models developed and proposed by a certain kind of historicist literary criticism, and most of all perhaps by Crocianism, a school which has all too often proved incapable of understanding the many-sided and contradictory situation of the art and culture of our century.

2. In his *Saggio critico sul Petrarca* De Sanctis, plotting a complex methodology for literary research, traced the profile of an aesthetics of form , which he placed within a modern philosophy of *poiein,* or poetic making. Not form as locus of the beautiful in itself and of hollow idols, nor form as shadow of the true, shadow of the concept, which belongs to Platonic petrarchism, but an idea of form in which *spirit, thought* and *concept* converge; so that in it we find "passion, imaginative heat, impression, pleasure, melancholy". Form is not, therefore,' an abstract paradigm of poetic making, but is the constantly *living life* which constantly *recreates itself-* it is totality. Thus only he ,who "conquers and tames and kills the ideal within himself, or in other words, realizes it, produces a form, of which all is fulfilled and

forgotten" can claim to be considered an artist. "Make me living things, and call them what you will' , writes De Sanctis in the note added to the second edition (1983) of the *Saggio* on Petrarch. And this remark contains the whole sense of an aesthetics which, in many respects, seems to move in a direction analogous to that of an author like Moritz who founds his philosophy of art on the notion of the "self-achieved". Thus the word "form" cannot be applied to anything that refers to the indefinite, the confused, the sketchy, the bare, the sliced, the exaggerated, the over-abundant, the allegorical, the abstract, the general, the particular, but only to that which is *identical to itself.* If there is a geology of art, this dissolves in form and *re-signifies itself* on another plane. And the aesthetic occurs, *appears,* with the appearance of form, into which the *anterior world* of art immerses, fuses and forgets itself. Therefore, De Sanctis notes, "form is itself, as the individual is himself, and no theory is more destructive of art than that which constantly fills our ears with the beautiful, the manifestation, vestment, light, or veil of the true or of the idea. The aesthetic world is not appearance, but substance; it is in fact substance, the living itself; its criteria, its reasons for living are summed up in this single motto: I am alive." (F.De Sanctis, *Saggio Critico sul Petrarca,* edited by E. Bonora, Bari 1955,p. 29). The *living itself* is not just the *Grund* of art, but the *telos* towards which form tends; it is the movement through which the artist "forgets himself in things, and the more he forgets himself, the more those things leap forth alive and true, appearing in a light of their own: *in this obliteration of the world,* the "highest ideality of expression" is achieved, which for De Sanctis consists of *idealizing things.* These are some of the reflections that led De Sanctis to study authors and moments in our literary history and in European civilization: Dante and the *Divine Comedy,* Machiavelli, Guiccardini, Foscolo, Parini, Ariosto, Tasso, Mazzini and Leopardi ... He returns to Leopardi on several occasions not only to rescue him from certain interpretations tending to favour the civil and patriotic *canzoni* (and to stress the poetic power of the *Idilli*) but to make observations on the plane of the theory of art. Witness his analyses of prose and of that artistic form of prose which is dialogue, through which Leopardi criticized a certain oratory tendency and introduced - with a new kind of prose - seriousness of thought and, with it, the inventive faculty. In prose Leopardi sought, apart from its logical qualities, the effects of art. "The imagination", writes De Sanctis, " is excluded from this prose , as force of the spirit, generator of illusions, and opponent of the true. But it is present there in the form of myth or fable, as a veil beneath which thought appears, or as an imaginative base from which reason springs forth". (F. De Sanctis, *Giacomo Leopardi,* ed. E. Ghidetti, Rome 1983, p. 217).

De Sanctis's reflection on Leopardi's conception of prose, the interpretation of the *dialoghi* or the reading of the *idilli*, no less than the studies on Dante and Manzoni, and certain eye-opening pages in the *Storia della letterature italiana*, show the meaning and aesthetic importance of a criticism which is sensitive to the problem of the respective relationships between poetry and philosophy, poetry and abstract thought, and form and content. They are perspicuous observations, part of that *aesthetic project* on which De Sanctis had been working from 1856 to 1860, while teaching at Zurich Polytechnic. It is a project which, despite marked differences and a different cultural horizon, appears *within* and contiguous with Hegel's reflections on art. De Sanctis refers in fact to Hegel and repeats the idea by which "he who grasps the situation is already an artist", and that develops the principle according to which "the beautiful is nothing other than the harmony of form and idea". And form and idea *are born together*.

The reference to Hegel is essentially of criteriological value. It makes it possible to evaluate aesthetic ideas on the scale of precise critical interpretations, and to devise categories that test the living reality of art. Thus, the boundaries of the poetic field can be marked out as locus of multiple tensions and of infinite movements - field as *parti pris*, we would say nowadays, as *argument* which -as De Sanctis observed in an essay entitled, in point of fact, *Dell' argomento nella Divina Commedia*, first published in 1857 in the *Rivista Contemporanea* -is not a *tabula rasa* on which anything may be imprinted: the argument is "a conditioned and pre-determined subject already containing within itself virtually its entire poetics- its organic laws, its concept, its parts, its form and its style". Style, form- in other words the organic unity of art. 'In my view the essence of art is form , not form as vestment, veil, mirror or what have you, manifestation of a generality distinct from it, however united to it it my be; but form, into which the idea has already passed, and in which the individual has already risen: this is the real organic unity of art". Unity is the crucial element by which De Sanctis comes close to Hegel, even while resolutely moving away from him.

With De Sanctis a genuine reform of idealistic aesthetics got under way, in which he was to recover the modes and procedures of a certain realistic and bourgeois narrative of the nineteenth century; and above all be heedful of the great scientific revolution of the century, the decisive turning points in the very perspectives of modern culture.

3. When *Il darwinismo nell 'arte* (1883) appeared, it seemed to many that De Sanctis had made a positivist choice and introduced evolutionist intentions into his critical perspective, largely disowning his idealist and Hegelian Background. But this essay, which should be read in relation to *Il principio del realismo*, is a decisive opening towards modern forms of poetic making,

in a sort of *return to things*, namely, a sort of *Journey through* poetry as a living and *bold* reality.

The essay traces the lines of a critical method more closely adherent to reality and more fruitful for studying and understanding artistic works; and states the need to set aside a musical and idyllic imaginative literature in order to reconstruct the world of lyrical phantoms having as its basis a consciousness that has been *remade* and *reconnected* with life. Darwinism, in this light, is thus nothing other than the rule and discipline of the imagination; it is the very criterion of realism which has nothing whatsoever in common with positivist objectivism, but which presents itself as a movement capable of developing all the richness to be found in existence. In this regard, De Sanctis speaks of a new realism which "can be considered as yet a further formation of Hegel's doctrine", in that certain great Hegelian thoughts "like the identity of being and knowing, the objective nature of concepts, the meaning of morality in world history and many others are not only admitted, but re-worked, and once the obscure, the contradictory and the false mixed with the true have been removed, brought forth in all their truth in a clear form.....".

Realism takes the form of *Lebenswelt*, which penetrates the works of constantly new materials and transforms the entire range of our perceptions, develops our sense of the real, establishes the closest of ties between our *poietic* capacities and potentialities and the world of art. The modern sciences- and Darwinism is to be considered a science in that it presents itself as an authentic vision of the world- have brought about a revolution in the modern age, affecting our behaviour and the way in which we view, understand and interpret things.

Thus we must make the effort to catch things in their state of becoming; analogously, in art we must know how to seize the sense of the living, the autonomy of the *poetic person*, the *plasticism of form*, the *calm of feeling*, popularity of expression, naturalness.. The fact , however, that one is becoming aware of the end of the great narrations, does not mean the collapse, or surrender, of philosophy; on the contrary, it demands a "problematic adjustment" to the variety of things, a redefinition of the strategies of knowledge. Unlike what since occurred, De Sanctis notes, when our spirit was willing to seek ideas, *l' esprit des choses* and to inhabit the abstract regions of the concept, making use of particular kinds of knowledge rooted in grammars, rhetorics, logics and metaphysics, in the modern age we need to develop a new approach to knowledge, by which we may study things in themselves, in their nature and their life- a knowledge, that makes use of chemistry, natural history anatomy, physiology, pathology, which are not to be considered "special studies", but membership cards of that *general culture* which is transforming life, literature and art. In other words, De

Sanctis sensed with extraordinary lucidity the twilight of the old humanist vision, the exhaustion of the reasons which had supported Western civilization for centuries. In the face of such a situation one can take the line of the *laudatores temporis acti*, typical of a certain academic and university culture, suspicious of everything that is emerging in society and in the world; De Sanctis steers clear of these facile solutions, trying rather to understand the reasons that have led to the great nineteenth century scientific revolution and to find there a possible space for the forms of art, sensibility and imagination.

4. Even if many of his remarks (and not just those concerning the political and ideological battles he fought), would seem to warrant positivist readings, De Sanctis, when insisting on the need of an art which is *closer to things*, had no intention whatever of adhering to those naturalistic poetics developing in the culture at the end of the century. On the contrary, through a general reform of idealist aesthetics, he wished to reconstruct a philosophy of art inscribed in an *ontology of the infinite*.

Let us consider a few theoretical questions dealt with in the *Studio sopra Emilio Zola*. In each novel- De Sanctis remarks- there is a fable conceived and woven," so as to express the movement of natural forces in its necessary course, the resulting effect of which is character and personality". De Sanctis immediately defines his terms. In order to conceive and weave a fable of the kind invented by Zola, science and observation, he adds, are not enough: what are needed are ideal faculties, the first of which is the constructive and architectonic, which leaves nothing to chance, to miracle or marvel, but preordains and coordinates everything. Zola, he observes, experiments but does not register facts and findings passively: he constructs in such a way as to be considered not so much a scientist as a metaphysician, who does not entrust himself to the Absolute and its laws, but invents fictional realities, possible universes. In this way Zola " is himself the one who forms the world according to his idea", constructing his poetic fable, whose basis is certainly reality, but reality that dissolves and dies within the variety of forms and new colours belonging to art and poetry.

At the end of paragraph IX of the *Studio*, De Sanctis gives an exemplary clarification of his conception of art. "Artists", he writes, "are like great magicians who make objects as light as shadows, take them, over and make them creatures of their imagination or shaping hand. The real is simply the raw material, transformed by that industry called art; ..... Art in its transformations must keep the base intact, reproducing in its inventions and transformations natural reality, even imitating the natural process. What makes him an artist is his living feeling for the human ideal and his powerful constructional and representational imagination."

(F. De Sanctis, *Studio sopra Emilio Zola*, in *Saggi critici*, vol. III, edited by L. Russo, Rome-Bari 1979 [4], p. 304).

This is an illuminating step where the field of art is identified, art as self-sufficient form, albeit revealing in *being* what it is the infinite variety of its ways and its structure . Content and form are one. Even if in the form of art there is a slight surviving trace of the memory of the world this has lost its real beauty.

De Sanctis undoubtedly owes this aesthetic perspective to the time he spent in the company of Romantic philosophy and Hegel's thought in particular, but it achieves tangible form above all through the critical analysis, interpretations and readings of poets and prose writers.

Rene' Wellek rightly compares De Sanctis's work to that of Belinsky or Taine, for the Italian critic's rare capacity to be at once a historian, critic and judge of poetry - contributing to a decisive renewal of Italian aesthetic culture not only as regards the "classicist" tradition, but also in relation to certain proposals, with strong ideological connotations (Cantu, Settembrini), which in the second half of the nineteenth century seemed to find a wide hearing in Italy.

5. What then is De Sanctis's place in the history of art criticism? This is a question that Croce asks himself in *Storia dell ' estetica per saggi* (Rome-Bari 1967, p. 237), where after identifying connections, relations and differences between De Sanctis's criticism and that of Foscolo and Giovita Scalvini, he remarks that De Sanctis, though having spent a long time in the company of Hegelian philosophy, whose abstract aesthetic conceptualism he rejected, was unable to determine what "form" is in art. And intuition? And figure? And the event that takes place as self-sufficient monad? Or is it a fundamentally vague, ambiguous, shifting, *peripheral* space?

Undoubtedly De Sanctis lacks the philosopher's "deductive rigour", and there are many oscillations and contradictions in his theoretical work. But , perhaps, the very indeterminacy of the idea of form allows him to grasp the complexity of the modes of the *poiein*, its polyphonic variations; to identify the absolute in things, in that world of life which in the final analysis constitutes the condition by which an infinity number of fictional universes and possible worlds can be realised. Croce thought he had reformed De Sanctis's project, by calling form *intuition* and thus distinguishing it from all the other forms of the spirit. But here we should ask ourselves whether Croce's *intuition* genuinely defines the autonomy of art, or whether it does not end up, rather, as a sort of abstractism, which makes the world of forms extremely uncertain.

At the conclusion of his *Filosofia dell ' arte*, Gentile stressed the theoretical shakiness of Croce's criticisms of De Sanctis, on the very question of form. Post- Desanctisian aesthetics, wrote Gentile, "has been the work of literary decadentism and dilettantism, removing the problem of art from that serious, religious, profoundly philosophical world in which De Sanctis had placed it; and offering as a solution a doctrine that could be regarded as conforming to his predecessor's by someone with no more than a surface approach to ideas. De Sanctis's art is indeed form, but form of life; life in all its complex constitution, with its moral value, its ideals, with science, with philosophy, and with its religious content. A form which presupposes and implies. in that it resolves in itself each of its presuppositions, a world, which is *the* world: the idea, in the profound sense in which Hegel speaks of it. A world, which, a critic cannot ignore; and which he must feel inside himself, and seek through art, or in his criticism. With criticism, and with De Sanctisian aesthetics we each of us feel that we are entering and enclosing ourselves inside the poem, but there we find the whole of life with all its laws" (Gentile, *La filosofia dell 'arte*, Florence 1973 [3], p. 320).

Entering the poem means entering the organic unity of an autonomous world; getting closer to the works, evaluating the difference between artist and poet, questioning oneself, for example, on the role in Dante's *Comedy* of allegory, asceticism, the religious and political struggle and tradition.... Entering the poem means, therefore, understanding how in Dante's consciousness there was " a real world, which was too alive and impassioned and resistant to be dissolved and transformed by art".

Certainly, every work bears in itself a temporal connotation, the index of a content not entirely transformed; but the more imperceptible this connotation makes itself, the more it becomes poetry, as way into the world. De Sanctis's form is, in fact, the announcement of the birth of the constantly new world of poetry.

6. De Sanctis's thought and work have exercised a significant influence on twentieth century Italian criticism and aesthetics. At times this influence has been cultural and ideological. There has been a De Sanctis as forerunner of Croce, a Gentilian De Sanctis, a De Sanctis as trail-blazer for Gramsci's programme. But, despite the use to which his thought has been put, one can say that an authentic De Sanctisian re-birth did occur above all in the late 1930s, when the recovery of poetics, despite the scant attention given them by Croce and Gentile, became an intrinsic part of Italian aesthetic research.

This *revaluation*, as Anceschi observed in *Le poetiche del Novecento in Italia*, occurred: a) in the critical consciousness of twentieth century artists (in ideal continuity with what had been done by the great symbolist poets from Baudelaire to Mallarme to Valery); b) in idealist philosophy, with the revision carried out by Luigi Russo in his now classic work, *Problemi di metodo critico* (1929), or by Walter Binni, who in 1936, published a key text like *La poetica del decadentismo italiano*; c) finally, through the great turning point represented by the phenomenological school of Banfi.

The *revaluation* in some measure occurs *within* a cultural situation that is extremely open and problematic. One need only think of works like Ugo Spirito's *La vita come arte*, Galvano della Volpe's *Poetica del Cinquecento* or Luigi Pareyson's *Estetica*, in which, from the perspective of the theory of formativity, strong emphasis is laid on the value of the poetic dimension which must animate and sustain *the formation of the work.*

The redemption of poetics in certain respects meant the rebirth of thought such as De Sanctis's which was fundamentally concerned with taking us inside the organic unity of art; in other respects it involved calling into question forms, intentions, analyses and procedures of general theories of art, above all neoidealistic theories, and Croce's aesthetics in particular.

7. The first edition of Antonio Banfi's *I problemi di un 'estetica filosofica* (1946) opens with a long dedication to Mario Rossi, in which Banfi outlines the construction of a philosophy capable of grasping the multiform life of art and of rethinking -outside certain logicisms of the various schools -some fundamental problems of the artistic world Banfi's project was also constructed as a *reply* to theories that consist of defining *an abstract aesthetic ideal of art*, which they presume to impose as a model. Philosophical idealism, declares Banfi, has forgotten the reality of art, its structural tension, its rootedness in the naturalness of the real; and above all it has confronted the problem of contemporary art without understanding it and without replying to it. Banfi's criticism refers not only to the artistic situation of the early twentieth century in Italy, but assails the very foundations of neoidealist aesthetics. Witness Gentile, for whom the world of art is not a cosmos distinct in itself, but "the series of works of art as positive actuality of the aesthetic a priori synthesis"; therefore the aesthetic principle, which does not have a univocal meaning - presenting itself one moment as form, the next as soul of the work of art, yet again as hidden divinity which takes hold of us - never succeeds in acquiring validity "as effective law of constitution of the artistic experience..." (A. Banfi, I *problemi di un'estetica filosofica*, Milan 1961 [2], p.52). And witness above all Croce, whose work

in the field of aesthetics must be regarded as going even beyond the bounds of his theory in general.

The criticism, then, that Banfi levels at Croccan and Gentilian aesthetics is intended not only to probe the complex points of Italian neoidealist philosophy, but to open the way to a phenomenological analysis of artistic making and a reflection on the modern.

Banfi also speaks of the battle fought by Croce and Gentile with different methods for a deeper speculative enquiry into cultural problems; but it was, a battle that was not completely won, mainly because neoidealism proved incapable of competing with other trends of thought which, from the end of the last century, had brought about a profound renewal of the structure and figures of modernity.

8. Here we would do well to turn from Banfi's analysis to a reconsideration of certain central questions in Croce's thought from the standpoint of contemporary reflection on art.

In *Contributo alla critica di me stesso*, Croce "narrates" the story of his studies, his reading and his passions. The first of these was De Sanctis, from whom he borrows certain fundamental features, such as the concept by which art "is not a work of reflection and logic, nor the product of artifice, but spontaneous and pure imaginative form". Then, Bertrando Spaventa and Hegel - a Hegel as interpreted and adapted by Marx and Engels; and, again, Herbartism, naturalism.

The bitter anguish (aspro travaglio) which led Croce to the construction of *L'Estetica* is articulated both by going beyond naturalistic logic through the logic of spiritual grades and by going beyond naturalistic transcendence through the criticism of literary genres, grammar, individual arts and rhetorical forms. Along the line of these enquiries, Croce poses himself the problem of the nature-art relationship, denying reality to the nature of art and "finding it everywhere to be not reality, but a product of abstracting thought". In this way he goes beyond the dualism of Spirit and Nature in the awareness "that true thought is simply thought, beautiful expression simply expression", whereas false thought and ugly expression constitute non-thought and non-expression, in other terms non-being "which has no reality outside the dialectical moment which places and dissolves it".

After the first edition of *Estetica* (1902), which still bears residues of naturalism and a sort of Kantian-derived classificatory topology of the forms of knowing, Croce *discovered* Hegel, whose doctrines he had previously "sampled". It was a decisive discovery, under whose sign (the year is 1905) the turning point was to occur regarding the essential foundations of thought followed up to

that time. More than the other works, the 1907 *Estetica* reveals the reasons for this change: in it, in fact, beyond the general anti- positivist disposition supporting it, there is a redefinition of certain concepts on which Croce had been working since 1893: the conceptual affinity between history and art; literary criticism as critico-aesthetic operation and not as a philological job of mere expository assessment; the autonomy of art. These ideas are pondered along with other concepts- such as philosophical economics which consacrates the category of the useful, formalism of a Kantian kind recovered for the purpose of establishing the moral, and Marxist materialism understood as canon of historical interpretation - each of these concepts is placed in the general theoretical order of the philosophy of the spirit.

9. Art, writes Croce at the beginning of the *Breviario di estetica*, is " what everybody knows it to be". A statement which might appear to tend towards phenomenology, intent as it is on understanding the empirical aspect of classifications of poetics and the arts. But the reference to the *communis opinio* is immediately dissolved in the definition of art as lyric intuition and of feeling as what gives coherence and unity to the impression: "intuition is really such because it represents a feeling, and only from that and above that can it spring. Not the idea, but feeling is what confers on art the airy lightness of the symbol: an aspiration enclosed in the movement of a representation, that is what art is ... What we admire in genuine works of art is perfect imaginative form, which assumes there a state of mind; and this we call life, compactness, fullness of the work of art" (B. Croce, *Brevario di estetica*, Bari 1954 [12], p. 33).

Crocean *form*, unlike that of De Sanctis, which is achieved and realized within things, as *living spirit*, is to be seen as organism, "whose principle is the organism in itself", as autonomous space, free of concepts "and simpler than the so-called perception of the real". "The aesthetic act is, therefore, form, and nothing else but form" (B. Croce, "*Estetica come scienza dell' espressione e linguistica generale*, Bari 1965 11, p. 19).

In Crocean thought, there is no place for an empirical aesthetics, nor even for literary institutions, genres, the techniques of individual arts which figure rather as materials or "gatherings" that cannot be accounted for by science. Croce reasserts the autonomy of form which must be rigorously distinguished from any practical value, since it would be a mistake to pretend that the independence of art (the artist's inner intuition or expression) "must necessarily be extended to the practical activity of extrinsic manifestation and communication, which may either follow or not follow the aesthetic fact.....". (B. Croce, *Estetica*, etc., cit., p. 128)

10. There is, at the same time, *another* aesthetics originating and developing on the river- bed of symbolism; and which, through inhabiting an area distant from that of nineteenth century Italy, in many respects seems close in intention to authors like De Sanctis and poets like Leopardi. This is the aesthetics that originated in Poe's reflections, to be followed by Baudelaire and Mallarme, and achieve its most significant results in Valery.

Croce knew these authors, who figure in the *Storia dell 'estetica per saggi*, in *Poesia e non poesia,* as well as in odd notes, in essays and annotations. But they were neither to his taste nor sensibility; they could not *enter* the domain of the idea of intuition and above all they could not be brought into the order of a philosophy constructed under the sign of distinguishing and systematizing. When he read the *Petite histoire des grandes doctrines litteraires en France* (1946) by Van Tieghem, who considered Valery one of the most profound aesthetologists of the twentieth century, Croce wrote an extremely cutting essay, in which he declared that the French poet "knew absolutely nothing of what since ancient times, and above all in the modern centuries since the Renaissance, had been sought and rediscovered and reasoned about poetry, art and literature". The study on *L' estetica di Valery* and the essays on Baudelaire and Mallarme' give us a clear and unequivocal idea of the meaning of Croce's reflection on the *modern*, which had overturned taste and tradition, and broken the continuity of tradition.

As for Mallarme's poetry, it was the product of affected obscurity, wilful construction and calculation; while his reflections on pure poetry had no theoretical legitimacy whatsoever.

Mallarme's theoretical fragility, in Croce's view, finds its landing stage in Valery, who did not understand what poetry is, who in fact hated everything that poets have felt within themselves as a "grace"; he thought that a poet could only be of value as a critic of himself. In short, Valery's aesthetics is a poetry-game, sustained by three elements: construction, full intellectual consciousness, the accident of invention...

These, quite clearly, are judgements which find legitimacy in a strongly theoretical aesthetics., which reads and interprets the forms and modes of literature from the perspective of a *logic of distinction,* and which is not concerned about "following" the evolution of the arts, their continuous transformations.

In these arguments, which have here been necessarily abbreviated, Croce showed that he had failed to grasp the meaning of the great modern revolution, not only because he had moved inside a *philosophical* and *literary* idea of art, but also because he had kept his eyes fixed on the past, on tradition. He had

refused to measure his strength against that topology of the modern whose cipher Valery perceived with revelational, startling words when, in *The Conquest of Ubiquity*, he wrote: " Our fine arts were established .... in a very different time from ours, by men whose power we possess today. But the extraordinary development of our means, the ductility and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they have introduced make it inevitable that there will be imminent and extremely profound changes in the ancient industry of the beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical part which cannot be considered and treated as it has up to now, which cannot ignore the achievements of modern knowledge and capacities. For twenty years now neither material, nor space nor time have been what they had always been in the past. It is only a matter of time before such great novelties completely transform the technique of the arts, before they act with it on inventiveness itself, and even reach the point of marvelously modifying the very notion of art" (P. Valery, *La conquista dell ' ubiquita*, in *Writings on Arts*, Italian tr., Milan, p. 107).

To modify the notion of art means to enter the scandal of modernity- the region of the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent.

11. Croce did not enter modernity. Perhaps he was afraid of losing himself there.

Contemporary aesthetics, when it has wished to confront Crocean thought, has placed it in a different setting -that of the great post-symbolist season, of the avantguarde, of hermeneutics, of phenomenology. And it is also that post-Crocean setting which, according to Gianfranco Contini, makes the order of the day literary criticism "as criticism of style"; and " a true practice of science' that does not leave it in its [.....] low, ancillary position in the hierarchy" (cf. G. Contini, *La parte di Benedetto Croce nella cultura italiana*, Turin 1989 2, pp.54-55).

The *objects* "posed by history" are, according to Contini, also key points of contemporary aesthetic thought. The exploration of that thought is often conducted tentatively - " It is not impossible", Valery foretold "that one day it will be conducted systematically".

Orientations of Phenomenological Aesthetics in Italy: The Encounter with Marxism and Semiotics

STEFANO BENASSI

The interest in phenomenology promoted in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century by Edmund Husserl, found its first advocate in Italy in Antonio Banfi (1886-1959). Professor of Philosophy at the University of Milan, as early as the 1920s Banfi introduced Husserl to Italian culture, at that time dominated by Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile.

In *La fenomenologia pura di Edmund Husserl e l 'autonomia ideale della sfera teoretica* (1923), Banfi makes perfectly clear what separates phenomenology from Croce and Gentile's idealism[1].

The ideal transcendent forms in the movement of thought, at the basis of Croce's doctrine, come in for the young Banfi's criticism no less however than the same *a priori* essences *(eide)* at the centre of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen.*

What Banfi does is to have phenomenology interact with Kantian neoplatonism, emphasizing the problems of the relation between *essences,* understood as autonomous entities utterly distinct from the empirical events whose meaning they constitute, and *transcendental consciousness.* According to Banfi, such a problem should be placed on the plane of its immanent resolution. During the period he spent in Berlin (1910-11), his critical attitude towards Husserl accompanied a deeper exploration of Hegelian thought and Simmel's relativism.

The main task of phenomenology, wrote Banfi in 1939, is the construction of a universal system, open to the infinite, and capable both of offering knowledge a principle of integration and theoretical development, and of justifying and regulating the supply of ever new and more profound elements to knowledge itself.

In the 1920s texts and particularly in *Filosofia della vita spirituale* and *Principi di una teoria della ragione* (1926), Banfi sees in experience the field of the incessant relations between self and world, subjectivity and objectivity. They are the ideal poles of the world of culture which express themselves concretely in the spheres of art, morality and religion. Each of them acquires autonomy in relation to the others according to its own synthetic principle, which is universal and rational, and is thus connected to the regulating principle of

human experience, which is the principle of reason. According to Banfi, *rationality* does not define the field of experience *a priori*, but rather identifies its most profound meaning and value.

No less relevant is the distinction between *aestheticity* and *art* developed by Banfi in *Il principio trascendentale dell ' autonomia dell ' arte. Aestheticity (L'esteticita)* is the way of the transcendental understanding of experience. Its object is to seize the unitary meaning of life and of the life of art, integrating and correlating its concrete forms of realization[2].

Here is measured the entire rejection of neoidealistic theories which re-propose the problem of the definition of art. In Croce as in Gentile art assumes its specific value only in relation to the general movement of thought, to the place art occupies in the Spirit. In *Estetica come scienza dell ' espressione e linguistica generale* (1902) Croce's definition of art as intuition places art in the realm of the circularity of the life of the Spirit (art/philosophy; economics/ morality) as its first moment of expression, totally outside conceptual reflection. In relation to such general criteria, it was thus possible for Croce to reach the point of distinguishing within Dante's *Divine Comedy* -but this was to become the general criterion of Crocean criticism - what is *poetry* from what is *not poetry (La poesia di Dante.,* 1920) devaluing precisely those specific and technical aspects of the life of art, like literary and artistic *genres,* which he considers mere conceptual instruments that discredit true artistic intuition, the lyrical expression of feeling, as such *ineffable* and *untranslatable.*

Gentile's position too -synthesized in the *Teoria generale dello Spirito come atto puro* (1916) and *Filosofia dell ' arte* (1913)- outlined the idea of pure art as a quid *that* is elusive and inseparable from the spiritual *act* in all its complexity. Consequently, the same absolute theoretical concept of the *pure act* is responsible for the devaluation of the element of theoretical and technical reflection which, according to Banfi, belongs to the artistic outlook, and other spheres of human activity[3].

Banfi is not interested in defining a philosophical *system,* but in linking it to a method that makes it possible to analyse and integrate the data of experience. The definitions of art offered by neoidealism such as *intuition* and *ineffability* are consequently called strongly into question. The general meaning of philosophical aesthetics, as it is identified in *I problemi di una estetica filosofica* (1932), does not, then , consist of defining what is art, but in stressing *the idea of aestheticity* as an autonomous rational principle.

The artistic experience occurs within the dynamic tension between subject and object, self and world[4].

In Banfi's subsequent works an increasing importance is assumed by the notion of *World* , seen as the syntheses of experiences consisting of moments of theoretical reflection and technico-pragmatic solutions. The evaluation of artistic activity and the incidence on it of theoretical reflection highlight the *heteronomous* moment of art, in other words the cultural and social context in which it was produced.

In the years immediately following the end of the Second World War, Banfi supported Marxism, stressing the *social* aspect of art in his aesthetic system[5].

In the Italian cultural panorama between the two wars the confrontation with Croce along Marxist lines had, in point of fact, already been initiated by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). As Eugenio Garin has authoritatively emphasised[6], a continuous dialogue with Croce's positions runs through Gramsci's entire cultural activity, and is not just limited to the careful analysis contained in *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*[7]. This in no way detracts from Gramsci's originality of thought, but rather highlights one of its peculiar features: the theoretical and combative commitment to the present, in opposition to the dominant cultural positions: the latter are to be discussed, integrated and never rejected out of hand.

Nicolo Machiavelli's notion of *effectual truth (verita effettuale)*, factual truth, (see *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo stato moderno)*, acts in Gramscian thought as a model for inspiring concrete effectual choices, in consideration of a *new culture*[8]. The criteria guiding such choices apparently owe a great deal to Crocean reflection. Indeed, Gramsci himself emphasizes the value of Crocean historicism, even if he then focusses on its idealistic reduction, against which he insists on the need to realise a *philosophy of praxis*, where man's economic life and concrete labour are the priority realms. But to do this, what we need is a new type of intellectual whom Gramsci describes in *Gli intellettuali specialista Politico:* a man capable of freeing himself from the rhetoric of empty abstract discourse and of pointing a concrete way to a new model of society.

In the sphere of literary analysis Gramsci *bestows radically new meanings* on the Crocean concepts of *form* and *content: form* becomes synthesis of language, and *content* comes to indicate an attitude towards life, a way of thinking, that gives back to art its role in the sphere of a precise social context.

In this order of ideas the particular task of literary criticism thus changes , no longer operating in the light of the distinction in the text between *poetry* (intuition) and *non poetry* (reflection), as happens in Crocean thought, but having as its goal intellectual and moral education, from which only a national-popular

literature can emerge, able to express the needs, reflections, emotions and feelings of a society and an epoch *(see Letteratura e vita nazionale).*

In Gramsci's view, to express the ways of a popular culture does not necessarily mean taking about peasants or workers, or adopting the formulae of *Socialist realism.* The struggle for a new culture is expressed through attention to social problems in their full complexity. In this sense, Gramsci postulates a notion of realism which is quite different from that indicted by other theorists of Marxism like Gyorgy Lukacs, who takes as his basis the Leninist theory of the *mirroring of reality.* The adequacy of artistic reproduction with respect to reality is not measured by the greater or lesser degree of mechanical representation of events nor in social factors that tend to highlight the processes of transformation of capitalist canon of transformation is introduced which suffocates tendencies to autonomous innovation in artistic practice.

Banfi, for his part, admits that *realism* can become a guiding factor for art, providing it contributes to making the work of art an active agent in the process of the transformation of reality. *Realist* art, for Banfi should prefigure that dimension of freedom and totality of human being to be found in the artistic *elastsicity* of antiquity.

Among Banfi's pupils, Enzo Paci (1911-1976), who taught at the University of Milan, goes further into this theme of the encounter between phenomenology and Marxism, in the final phase of his reflection. According to Paci, we should resume the solicitations that Edmund Husserl offered in his last work, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1935-37), particularly all those regarding the search for *meaning.*

The act of the suspension of judgement (*epoche*), by which the world is revealed in its "living presence" (*Lebendige Gegenwart*), shows the *subjective intentionality* which is directed at objects, giving them a meaning and revealing the *telos* immanent in them.

The phenomenological *epoche* highlights the world of origin, the world of life (*Lebenswelt*), as the place where the intersubjective meaning of the process of the foundation of the real is reconstituted. And even if Marxism cannot be identified with any concretely realized ideologico-political project, it offers no less, in Paci's view, adequate historical sense to intentionality as revealed by the processes of phenomenological description.

In his two last works, *Funzione delle scienze e significato dell ' uomo* (1970) and *Idee per una enciclopedia fenomenologica* (1973), Paci re-interpreted Banfian rationalism, focussing on the contribution to it of existentialism and the influence

of the classic figures (Plato, Kant and Hegel). At the same time, in his studies of Mann, Rilke, Valery and Proust (9), the analysis of problems of art becomes also a way of exploring the theoretical and pragmatic significance of phenomenology in the name of an integral humanism. What seems to interest Paci still more is the phenomenological investigation of the formative processes of art[10], like *symbol, expression* and sense, and critical interpretation should not approach it as a thing, or object, but should trace the *poiesis* in art, its being praxis, operation, and at the same time constitution of value.

This is the position from which the Venetian philosopher Stefano Zecchi (1945 -), trained at the school of Enzo Paci, sets out. An expert in German Romantic thought and in Husserl, Zecchi, who is one of the foremost figures in Italian aesthetics, has in recent years developed a brilliant and original lines of research into the concept of *beauty (bellezza)* (see his book of that name)[11] . His Nineteen Theses in defence of beauty recently fired a lively debate in Italian aesthetic circles.

Beauty, according to Zecchi, is at the *origin* of every experience and every value. To recover the *beautiful* from the logical rationalism dominant in the modern world means for Zecchi to recover the *infinite possibility of sense* that belongs to truth Against the destructuring of form, the fragmentation of languages and the dispersal of sense, Zecchi asserts art's task of a cognitive pedagogy that may lead man back to the search for the *truth* and to the recognition of the disanthropomorphization produced by the logic of mere *functional validity* typical of scientific- technological knowledge.

As editor of *Estetica* (a series of volumes early published by Il Mulino, Bologna), Zecchi is enriching the aesthetic debate in Italy on remarkable themes such as *Destiny* (1991), *Symbol* (1992) and *East and West* (1993). Belonging to an older generation than zecchi, a pupil of Banfi's and of Adelchi Baratono's, is the Milanese philosopher and sculptor Dino Formeggio (1914-), editor of the journal *Fenomenologia e societa.* With regard to Banfi, Formaggio stresses the distinction between *esteticita* and *artisticita* (aestheticity and artisticity). Artisticity is the concrete objectivization of the aesthetic idea in a precise cultural context. Some of his major works - *Fenomenologia della tecnica artistica, L'idea di artisticita* (1962), *Arte* (1973) develop this thesis to the point of proposing aesthetics as a riqorous science in a manner not unlike Husserl's with respect to philosophy. This rigorous science will be a general aesthetics in so far as it is a science of the sensible world, and a special philosophy as a general theory of art. Taking up, then, the theses on the body itself that Husserl had developed in The Crisis of the European Sciences, Formaggio pays heed to the results of

the psychology of perception and anthropology. With these extra-philosophical contributions aesthetics may be defined as *prassi sensibile* (sensitive praxis), and the task of phenomenological investigation will thus be to recover the non-alienated value of work, together with the originary value of the body.

In his *Trattato di estetica*, the spheres of the poetical and the critical are held at a distance because they have "nothing to do with a general phenomenology of art"[12]. In this respect, Formaggio's theory distinguishes itself from that of Luciano Anceschi (Milan 1911-) Who too, incidentaly, is one of the most authoritative personalities in present-day Italian aesthetics. Professor at the University of Bologna from 1953 to 1981, honorary president of the Associazione Italiana per gli Studi di Estetica (AISE), of which he was one of the influential promoters in 1984, Anceschi, philosopher and literary critic, has also contributed notably to the renewal of Italian artistic culture, making his chair in Bologna a reference point for journals such as *Corrente, Letteratura, II Verri* (the magazine founded in 1956), and *Studi di Estetica:* and for groups such as Novissimi and Gruppo, of which he was one of the animators and theorists.

From *Autonomia e eteronomia dell'arte* (1936), the work in which he traced the main lines of the "new critical phenomenology" method, and subsequently in the works that followed - *Istituzioni della poesia* (1968), *II caos e il metodo* (1981) and *Gli specchi della poesia* (1989) - Anceschi has outlined a general theoretical model where aesthetics is not so much defined as a system, within which every experience is aprioristically defined, but as an open systematics, where the data of concrete aesthetic and artistic experience are integrated and correlated. It is therefore a systematics which signifies itself through the structures constituting it and not a system which signifies the structures. "Phenomenology ultimately reveals itself to be a critical form of relationism (not relativism)". Anceschi was to say, emphasizing too that his research proceeded under the aegis of a disillusioned humanism[13], for the purpose of recovering the true meaning of human activity.

Luciano Anceschi's thought has been followed up and examined closely by several of his immediate pupils, above all Renato Barilli (1935-) and Lino Rossi (1930-). Professor of the Phenomenology of styles at the University of Bologna, Renato Barilli has developed Anceschi's nuova fenomenologia critica (new critical phenomenology) in the direction of a science of culture intent on identifying the connections between the various aspects (historical, aesthetic, artistic and in particular scientific) of the field analysed[14]. Lino Rossi, Professor of aesthetics at the same university, has, for his part, further developed the historiography of aesthetic ideas implicit in anceschi's phenomenology, to which the latter had

devoted a specific essay[15]. For his part, Emilio Mattioli, Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Palermo, has given further consideration to the relations between the poetical and the rhetorical[16], becoming a much esteemed specialist in ancient rhetoric and studies of the Sublime, whose flourishing condition in present day Italy is due not least to him.

The so-called Bologna school, formed on the initiative of Luciano Anceschi in the late nineteen thirties, was to count a large group of scholars (see note 17). Theirs has been, objectively speaking, one of the most important contributions to the vitality of Italian aesthetics.

One cannot conclude this brief report without mentioning Umberto Eco, semiotics scholar at the University of Bologna, and very well-known abroad also as the author of two successful novels: *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum.* Trained in Turin at the school of Luigi Pareyson, as a young man Eco devoted himself to the study of medieval aesthetics, and particularly St.Thomas Aquinas's thought, subsequently moving on to semiotics and communications science, of which he was to become one of the canniest and most competent theorists.

The list of his works is long, and characterizes an entire season of Italian culture over the last thirty years: *La definizione dell'arte* (1959), *Opera Aperta* (1962), *La struttura assente* (1968), *Le forme del contenuto* (1971), *Segno* (1973), *Trattato di semiotica generale* (1975), *Lector in febula* (1979), as well as the more recent works, have contributed incisively to setting cultural phenomena in the light of Pierce's inferential model and Lotman's semiotic model.

Notes and References

1. A. Banfi, *'La fenomenologia pura di E. Husserl e l'autonomia ideale della sfera teoretica'* (1923) *in* Filosofi contemoranel, Florence 1961, p.3. On this theme see also S. Zecchi, *La fenomenologia dopo Husserl*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1978, 2 vols., I, pp.39-47.
2. L. Rossi, *Situazione dell'estetica in Italia*, Turin, Paravia, 1976, p. XVIII. Cf. also L. Rossi, *Fenomenologia critica e storiografia*, Milan, CLUEB,1983.
3. On Crocean and Gentilian aesthetics see L. Rossi, *'Schema critico dell'estetica neoidealistica italiana*, in *Studi di estetica*, Bologna, CLUEB, 1979, pp. 75-132.
4. Cf. A Banfi, *I problemi di un'estetica filosofica*, Milan-Florence, parenti, 1961, pp.87ff. (now in *Opere*, vol. V, ed. E. Mattioli and G. Scaramuzza, Reggio Emilia, Istituto A. Banfi, 1988.)
5. Cf. the essay 'Arte e socialita' (in A. Banfi, Filosofia dell'arte, Rome,

Editori Riuniti, 1962, pp.140-158 and now in *opere*, V, cit.), originally written as a paper for the International AestheticsCongress of 1956, the year of the Italian philosopher's death.

6. Cf. Eugenio garin, Gramsci e Croce?, in AA. VV., Studi gramsciani, proceedings of the conference (Rome. 11-13 January 1958), Rome 1958, in particular pp. 6-11.

7. For this, as for the other Gramscian texts, reference is to the edition of the *Quaderni dal carcere*, ed. V. Gerratana (Turin, Einaudi, 1974), written by Gramsci during his years of imprisonment in Fascist prisons and first published between 1948 and 1954.

8. On this problem cf. S. Benassi, *Banfi e Lukacs: la nozione e il concetto di realismo*, in *Lukacs e l'estetica contemoranea*, *Naples*, Temi Moderni, 1980, pp.163-188.

9. Cf. E. Paci, Esistenza e immagine, Milan , Tarantola, 1947; Relazioni e significati, Milan, Lampugnani Nigri, 1965-68, 3 vols.

10. Cf. L. Rossi, *Situazione dell'estetica in Italia*, cit.,m p. CX.

11. Cf. S. Zecchi, *La bellezza*, Turin, Bolinghieri, 1991, pp.14-15. (Spanish translation in press).

12. D. Formaggio e M. Dufrenne, *Trattato di estetica*, Milan, Modadori, 1981, 2 vols., I, p. 3.

13. L. Anceschi, *Ultima lezione e programma*, in AA. *Le grandi correnti dell'estetica novecentesca* (Proceedings of the International Conference, Siena 17-20 May 1990), ed. G. Marchiano, Milan, Guerini e associati, 1991, p.156

14. By R. Barilli see at least *Per un'estetica mondana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1964; *Poetica e retorica*, Milan, Mursia, 1969; *La retoorica*, ISEDI, 1979; *Culturologia e fenomenologia degli stili*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1982; *Corso di estetica*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1989.

15. L. Anceschi's essay, 'Modelli di metodo per una storiografia estetica' in *Da Bacone a Kant*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1972. As regards L. Rossi's research, in addition to *Situazione dell'estetica in Italia*, cited above, see *Studi di estetica*, Bologna, CLUEB, 1983.

16. Cf. E. Mattioli, *Luciano e l'Umanesimo*, Naples, Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1981; *Studi di poetica e retorica*, Modena, Mucchi, 1983; *Interpretazioni dello pseudo-Longino*, Modena, Mucchi, 1988.

17. Among the main members of the Bologna School are: Paolo Bagni, on poetics and rhetoric; Luciano Nanni on the relations between semiology and phenomenology; Fernando Bollino, on 17th and 18th century French aesthetics;

Alessandro Serra and Stefano Ferrari, on the psychology of art; Luco Vetri, on contemporary literary poetics; Carlo Gentili, on phenomenology and the relations between poetics and hermeneutics; and Stefano Benassi, on Marxist aesthetics, on the figurative arts and on the theory of the contemporary novel. The most recent research results have been discussed in a series of conferences, and subsequently collected and published under the title *Estetica e metodo: La Scuola di Bologna,* , ed. *L. Rossi, Bologna,* Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1990.

Italian Philosophical Aesthetics : A New Generation

LUISA BONESIO

To chart, however schematically, the main trends in Italian aesthetics, represented by the younger generations of scholars, is no easy task : the cultural picture in Itály in the last twenty years is unquestionably far richer and more complex than in the past, when the predominance of a few major trends of thought made affiliations more definitive and easily identifiable. Alongside the lineages of two or three schools of aesthetics, more historically significant by virtue of the number of their pupils and the extensiveness of their cultural activity-the Turin school, deriving from Banfi, and the Bologna school, generated by that of Milan through Luciano Anceschi- the Italian panorama appears rich in new departures not always easily traceable to a single matrix; and rich above all in its dialogue with authors and themes from other nations. At the same time, true to characteristics of Italian philosophical culture and Crocean legacy, there is, besides research activities of prevalently theoretical type, where priority is given to the conceptual analysis of aesthetic theories, and the bounds of vision and method often extended towards an idea of aesthetic thematics as settings for a non-sectorial, non-special philosophy, a wide research sector in the field of the history of the various aesthetics and poetics. A notable case in point are the numerous scholars affiliated to the University of Bologna who are engaged in the work, inaugurated by Luciano Anceschi, of an historical and philological reconnaissance of poetics, institutions and literary genres.

The grouping by philosophical areas, whose distinguishing features I shall attempt to delineate, should be taken as an essentially orienting ordering principle, and identifying device; for the truth of the matter is that every scholar expresses a plurality of facets, if only by virtue of the open and ongoing nature of his research. What also needs stressing is the incompleteness of this map, setting out, as it does, to chart those areas, at times particularly fecund and important for the rigour and originality of their research styles, that do not always coincide with the main university centres of aggregation of the discipline. In my account I have given pride of place to trends and positions that achieve the most interesting and philosophically stimulating results, and thus to those scholars who are less concerned with historical and philological reconstructions than with analysing the theoretical aspects of the problems from a *philosophical aesthetic* standpoint.

1. Geographical and intellectual affinities

A very interesting case of a group of scholars who, from a substantially similar cultural background, have found themselves developing different perspectives, all of which nevertheless share common interest in theoretical themes originating in Nietzsche, are those teaching at the Veneto universities of Padua and Venice. The best-known exponent is Massimo Cacciari, whom it would yet be grossly reductive to consider "simply" as an aesthetologist. Cacciari, *enfant prodige* of Italian culture since the early Seventies, whose current interests lie more in the direction of theory and theology than of aesthetics, is certainly one of the most vigorous, original and erudite thinkers on the contemporary scene. Many fields have been the object of Cacciari's reflections : town planning; the themes of *finis Austriae* and the "culture of crisis"; the philosophies of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein; poetry, music and painting; the question of the technical rationalization of politics and questions of contemporary economics. The publications belonging to this phase of Cacciari's passionate quest are : *Krisis. Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negativo da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein*[1], *Pensiero negativo e razionalizzazione*[2], *Dallo Steinhof, Prospettive viennesi del primo Novecento*[3]. Questions of geographical and cultural "frontier" are what Cacciari deals with, and he examines them with a view to drawing a theoretical profile of a possible central European cultural heritage, from which he seeks bearings on the catastrophic hairpin bends of late modernity. It is an inquiry which, whilst losing nothing of its radicality and passion, has in subsequent years focussed its attention ever more markedly on figures and moments in modern art and philosophy, considering them as ciphers of constitutive problems, such as those of representation, language and limit. This occurs in *Icone della Legge*[4], through mathematics, painting and music (Mondrian, Malevic, Florenskij, Freud, Kafka, Rosenzweig); and in *Angelo necessario*[5], a fascinating reading of the figure of the angel as hermeneut of the invisible, and thus crucial gnoseological question, through texts and images ranging from Jewish, Christian and Iranic antiquity, to Klee, Rilke, Corbin and Benjamin. In this way the aesthetic is certainly a horizon, but one of many, one which a philosophical investigation in recent years increasingly concerned with ontological and gnoseological questions[6] has been conducted.

A line of research which, in the 70s and 80s, comes very close to Cacciari's, is that of Giangiorgio Pasqualotto and Giorgio Franck, who originally belonging to the area of Nietzschian studies, have subsequently concerned themselves with aesthetic themes. After *Avanguardia e tecnologia. W. Benjamin, M. Bense e.i. problemi dell' estetica*[7] and various studies devoted to theme of ideology, such as *Pensiero negativo e civiltà borghese*[8], Pasqualotto has increasingly followed

a path leading from little understood aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy to the study of affinities traceable between certain expressions of Western philosophy and fundamental concepts of Oriental thought[9], so that today he devotes himself to comparative aesthetic studies, and Zen aesthetics in particular[10]. Giorgio Franck, for his part, is an interesting example of the new, highly theoretical aesthetics. Nietzschian in background as well, and interesting himself in Walter Benjamin[11] an author who has attracted many valid scholars - with *La passione della notte*[12] Franck goes in quest of "the fugitive centre of thought", removed from the world of light of the philosophical idea which from Plato onward has dominated the West, in so far as it is the legitimate origin of every discourse and action. In his book Franck's favourite interlocutors, Nietzsche, Blanchot, Levinas, vie as questioners around the principle in order to isolate that nocturnal "remainder", which the Platonising insistence on knowing neglects, or discards in the insignificance of the irrational, these themes recur in *Esistenza e fantasma. Ontologia dell' oggetto estetico*[13], this time in a succinct philosophical analysis of the philosophical paradox represented by the aesthetic 'thing' : on the one hand insignificant, opaque corporeity, empty and neutral, inconfutably existent; on the other hand, threshold towards new significances and new possible worlds. The object as image is shadow, idol, double, thingness akin to death, in that every work appears, in reality, only as the disappearance of the object. The event that occurs in the aesthetic object is not a coming to light, therefore, but a disappearance in the ge : it is, rather, that the existence of a phantom is silhouetted in the "other ight", in that abyss of exteriority, spoken of by Blanchot, out of which images come.

Finally, since he belongs to the same geographical and cultural area, mention should be made of Franco Rella, one of the most active scholars of the last twenty years. Rella's interests range from the avantguarde movements to Benjamin, Rilke and painting. In recent years he has represented a variant of that revival of the beautiful which has characterized Italian aesthetics[14]. the intention behind his position, articulated in *Bellezza e Verita and L' enigma della bellezza*[15] is to reconstruct a sort of alternative history of the beautiful in Western culture, from Heraclitus, Plato, Neoplatonism and Sohravardi the Persian to Proust and Simon Weil the deliberate assumption of the perspective of modernity, with the acceptance of all the differences that finally make them visible, allows Rella to trace the presence of the beautiful "as form that manifests its dissent", or in other terms, that insoluble terribleness or disharmony of which many poetic and visionary experiences are a testimony, but certain philosophies too. A beauty as dismemberment and paradox, and thus the objectivization of the infinite in a finite figure, or truth in the guise of appearance, fragment, enigma, or that "void"

which aesthetic modernity discovers in the interstices of representation, and which allows it to push back the confines of the world, entering ever new spaces. Here too aesthetics turns its attention towards truth rather than the conventions and rules of a subjectively conceived artisticity.

2. Hermeneutic plurality

As we have seen in the Veneto area, young Italian aesthetics often finds sustenance in authors and problems of such a kind as to call into question a strict disciplinary identification, if not aesthetics itself in its status a specialist knowledge. And this is also the case with those scholars whose research has been polarized by an interest in the thought of Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, or by psychoanalysis, hermeneutics or the theme of the sublime. A particularly significant example of a new eagerness on the part of aesthetics to converse with other research experiences, is provided by the studies of Giorgio Agamben, an author of refined interests, in whom an original result is produced by the marrying of aesthetic thought Benjaminian in character with the nervous fibre of a not always explicit psychoanalytics, as well as with a Warburghian philological method. Working with particular attention to style (the title of one of his writings is *Idea della prosa*[16], Agamben analyzes the themes of the modern destruction of experience[17], of language as it is linked with death[18] and with the phantom[19], pursuing a sort of topology of the unreal, enacted through examples drawn from different periods and areas of culture. Associated with the field of Benjaminian studies there are also young scholars of notable theoretical interest such as Fabrizio Desider[i20], Mario Pezzella[21] and Bruno Moroncini[22].

In the context of an aesthetics that is at once strongly theoretical in character, Kantian in approach and semiotic in its sympathies, Pietro Montani, one of the group of Emilio Garroni's pupils, deserves mention, as one of the most interesting Italian scholars of aesthetics. Combining an interest in the theory of historical avantguarde cinema (he is responsible for the Italian edition of Eisenstein and Vertov), an interest in poetic and literary semiotics with a no less intense interest in Kant, Heidegger and Gadamer, he has provided interesting studies on the concept of the self-reflecting character of poetic language examined in a fruitful dialogue with the most vital orientations of contemporary aesthetics, and with hermeneutics in particular[23]. Leonardo Amoroso belongs to a similar and allied area, Kantian and Heideggerian in approach. His solid skills in the field of the history of aesthetics, but above all his theoretical rigour and vigour make him an extremely significant figure. Though belonging to none of the main schools of aesthetics, and essentially theoretical in approach, Amoroso has studied the themes of communications, with reference to transcendentalism, existentialism, hermeneutics and semiotics, but also the thought of Heidegger, of whom he is

one of Italy's most acute interpreters[24]. A line that could legitimately be defined as hermeneutic includes the latest generation of pupils of the Turin school: Gianni Carchia, Roberto Salizzoni, Maurizio Ferraris, Federico Vercellone, all of whom are engaged in a survey of the ontologico-hermeneutic themes from German romanticism - based on Sergio Givone's relevant studies[25] - to American deconstructionism[26] and the now widespread aestheticization[27], via the history of hermeneutics and Derrida[28]. These have a good claim to be considered the most conspicuous and academically representative sector of the hermeneutic emphasis in aesthetic research.

But of course, over and above these ideal or actual groupings, the trends in Italian aesthetics in the most recent generations are far more variegated and plural, and often coincide with the singularity of individual research styles, as in the case of Franco Restaino's treaty on The History of Modern Aesthetics, (Storia dell' estetica moderna, Utet, Torino 1991) and the identification of themes and of peculiar paths followed by an intellectual formation ever less traceable to the common matrix of major schools, even when it is possible to trace a line of distant descent. Emblematic of this are those asthetologists gravitating around the Lombard universities of Milan and Pavia : in the case of Milan, mention should be made of the phenomenology derived line which, through the teaching Dino Formaggio, links up once more with Banfi, with his most recent descendents and their interest in romanticism and French aesthetics (Gabriele Scaramuzza, Stefano Zecchi, Elio Franzini)[29], in the case of Pavia (Luisa Bonesio), it is important to note the connection, echoing Banfi, of theoretical suggestions deriving from Nietzschian and Heideggerian philosophy, but also contemporary French speculation (above all as it relates to the theme of philosophical writing and the sublime) and an interest in Oriental thought.

3. A Window on the East

A more restricted, but no less significant, sector of Italian aesthetology has concerned itself with the study and comparativist encounter with Oriental traditions. The most representative figure in this area is Grazia Marchiano, who has devoted herself to the investigation of the forms of Oriental aesthetic thought, initially from a comparativist perspective, acquired in India at Visva-Bharati University (between 1969 and 1972), and deriving from the method and work of Ananda Coomaraswamy[30], but extending also to the masterly investigations of scholars such as the Japanese Isutzu and the French iramologist Corbin, who "have taught us to deconstruct speculative, literary, artistic and imaginal syntaxes of culturally distant works and systems", in volumes like *Il codice della forma*[31], *L'armonia estetica. Lineamenti di una civilta laotziana*[32]. Questions of symbology, metaphysics and interpretation

are dealt with in works such as *La parola e la forma*[33] and *La cognizione aestetica tra Oriente e Occidente*[34], while in more recent years Marchiano's interests have extended to the Far East, with studies on the aesthetic of miniature gardens, and on the relation between nature and artifice in Taoist and Zen aesthetics.

Her subsequent studies reflect new openings and new research possibilities (for example, a particular attention to themes of creativity, of virtual worlds and imaginal universes)[35], along with an indefatigable and extremely dynamic activity in cultural organisation, directed above all at the establishment of permanent relations between the various world aesthetic centres[36], and particularly at the setting up of bilateral exchanges between the universities of Siena and Kyoto, and the foundation of an international Centre of "East and West" Humanist Studies. All this testifies to a realisation that today more than ever it is indispensable to go beyond the historical limit of the classical Greek identification of Western aesthetic culture, to recognise the co-presence of various inflections and multiple departures in the field of aesthetic reflections. The expansion and hegemony of the Western model constitutes a phenomenon which has cut deeply, and more often than not laceratingly, into the fabric of other cultures; to remain remote from and inaccessible to Western *Ratio*. This is the backdrop against which the urgent and by now vital task is being carried forward in the attempt at a mutual "translation", however paradoxical and problematic, of cultural languages, even in such a discipline as aesthetics.

Notes and References

1. Feltrinelli, Milan 1976
2. Marsilio, Padua 1977.
3. Adelphi, Milan 1980.
4. Adelphi, Milan 1985 (2).
5. Adelphi, Milan 1986.
6. Cacciari's most recent, sizable book is *Dell'inizio*, Adelphi, Milan 1990.
7. Officina, Rome 1971.
8. Guida, Naples 1981.
9. *Il Tao della filosofia. Corrispondenze fra pensieri d'Oriente e pensieri d'Occidene*, e pensieri d'Occidente, Pratiche, Parma 1989.
10. *L'estetica del Vuoto*, Marsilio, Padua 1992.
11. Mention schould be made of his contribution to *Critica e storia*, ed. Franco Rella, CLUVA, Venice 1980.
12. Feltrinelli, Milan 1982.
13. Feltrinelli, Milan 1989.
14. In this regard, mention should be made of S. Zecchi's book, *La*

bellezza, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 1990, an attack against the theses of aestheticization and the avantguard movements, in the name of a romantic experience of the world.

15. Feltrinelli, Milan 1990 and 1991.
16. Feltrinelli, Milan 1985.
17. *L'uomo senza contenuto*, Rizzolia, Milan 1970; *Infanzia e storia*, Einaudi, Turin 1978. Agamben is also the editor of W. Benjamin's *Works (Opere)*.
18. *Il linguaggio e la morte*, Einaudi, Turin 1982.
19. *Stanze. La parola e il fantasma nella culture occidentale*, Einaudi, Turin 1977.
20. *W. Benjamin, il tempo e le forme*, Editori Riunti, Rome 19.
21. *L' immagine dialettica. Saggio su Benjamin*, ETS, Pisa 1982.
22. *W. Benjamin e la moralita del moderno*, Guida, Naples 1984.
23. *Il debito del linguaggio. Il problema dell' autoriflessivita estetica nel segno, nel testo e nel discorso, Marsilio*, Padua 1985; *Il linguaggio, is senso e l'esemplarita ermeneutica della poesia*, "Documenti di lavoro" of the Centro internazionale di Semiotica e Linguistica (International Centre of Semiotics and Linguistics), Urbino 1988.
24. His most important studies in aesthetics are *Senso and consenso Uno studio kantiano*, Guida, Naples 1984 and *L' estetica come problema*, ETS, Pisa 1988. Besides numerous contributions on Heideggerian thought, particularly on its relation with Holderlin, it should be recalled that Amoroso is translator and editor of M. Heidegger's *Erlauterungen zu Holderlins Dichtung (L poesia di Holderlin*, Adelphi, Milan 1988).
25. *Ermeneutica e romanticismo*, Mursia, Milan 1983; *Dostoevskij e la filosofia*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1984; *Storia dell' estetica*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1988; *Disincanto del mondo e pensiero tragico*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1989; La questione romantica, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1992.
26. M. Ferraris, *La svolta testuale. Il decostruzionismo in Derrida, Lyotard, gli "Yale Critics"*, Unicopli, Milan 1984.
27. Cf. the anthology of essays of AA. VV., *Immagini del postmoderno*, with introductory essays by P. Portoghesi and M. Ferraris, CLUVA, Venice 1983, and F. Vercellone's study, *Pervasivita dell' arte. Ermeneutica ed estetizzazione del mondo della vita*, Guerini, Milan 1990.
28. M. Ferraris, *Postille a Derrida*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Turin 1990 and *La filosofia e lo spirito vivente*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1991.
29. Of Gabriele Scaramuzza's writings see, particularly, *Le originidell' estetica fenomenologica*, Antenore, Padua 1976; *Banfi, la rigione e l'estetico*, CLUEP, Padua 1984; by

Stefano Zecchi, *La fondazione utopica dell' arte,* Unicopli, Milan 1983; *La magia dei sagi,* Jaca book, Milan 1984 and *La bellezza;* Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 1990; by Elio Franzini, *Il mito di Leonardo,* Unicopli, Milan 1984 and *Le leggi del cielo,* guerini & Associati, Milan 1990.

30. Grazia Marchiano has been an important go-between for the Italian reception of Ananda Coomaraswamy, of whom she has translated and edited *La trasfigurazione della naturea nell' arte (The Transformation of Nature in Art)*, Rusconi, Milan 1976, *Come interpretare un' opera d'arte (Why Exhibit Works of Art?)* Rusconi Milan 1977 and *Aforismi (Aphorisms),* Stile Regina editricc, Rome 1988. Mention should also be made of *L' invito alla lettura di Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Abstracta,* September 1988. Numerous works by Coomaraswamy have been translated into Italian, including, in the field of aesthetics, *Introduzione all 'arte e alla motologia dell' India,* La Salamandra, Milan 1984 and *Il grande brivido. Saggi di simbolismo e arte, (Traditional Art and Symbolism),* Adelphi, Milan 1987. It is not however, inaccurate to say that this availability of his works on the Italian publishing scene has not been matched by an analogous willingness to subject them, and particularly the aesthetic studies, to a salutary comparative treatment (which has, for that matter, been the case with Corbin as well).

31. Dedalo, Bari 1968.

32. Dedalo, Bari 1974. Aslo : *The Power of Ornament in Ritual and Art,* "Saras Research", Monograph Reprint Series,, nos. 4-5, 1984, *Reading;* the special number of *New Observations,* no. 64, 1989, New York, devoted to Hindu Aesthetics'; *'La voie de l' Occident et la voie de l' Orient'*, in *Melanges della "Revue d' Esthetique", Hommage a Mikel Dufrenne,* no. 21, 1992.

33. Dedalo, Bari 1977.

34. Guerini e Associati, Milan 1987.

35. *La creativita. Le base poetiche della mente,* Riza, Milan 1988; she is also editor of *La religione della terra. Vie sciamaniche universi immaginali, iperspazi virtuali nell' esperienze sacrale della vita,* a collection of writings in honour of E. Zolla, Red, Como 1991.

36. *Le grandi correnti dell 'estetica novecentesca, (Major Trends in Twentieth Century Aesthetics),* Guerini e associati, Milan 1991 (Proceedings of the international conference at the University of Siena, May 1990). Grazia Marchiano also coordinates a CNR research project concerned with the exploration of the "Oriental Renaissance" in eighteenth century Europe.

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy: A Short Critical Survey

GRAZIA MARCHIANO

With the publication of *Selected Letters of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*[1], a 479 page volume edited by Alvin More Jr. and Rama Poonambulam Coomaraswamy, (1988) four hundred of the several thousand letters written by the Anglo-Sinhalese thinker were made accessible to a wider readership for the first time. A third of these are, to all intents and purposes, 'mini-essays' of high speculative tenor which throw light on Coomaraswamy's metaphysical and aesthetic system, as yet ill-assimilated by European academic circles.

A new collection of writings, *What is Civilization ? and other Essays*[2] and the definitive bibliographical inventory, *Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: Bibliography/Index*[3], both edited by his son Rama, make the neglect of the author, a short critical profile of whom appears below, still less acceptable[4].

Half Asian, half Anglo-Saxon, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, in his studies of Indo-European art, philosophy and religion, explored the vestiges of the ancient world, the surviving fragments of metaphysics and beauty casually dismissed as superstition by the modern world. He revealed the ritual character of art and craft, the deep mythical strata of the creative imagination, the primarily intellectual, and only secondarily sensory, foundations of aesthetic pleasure. His social and political ideas, his controversial challenge of modern 'bugbears', though influenced by circumstances and settings almost entirely alien to those of today in Asia as in the West, offer arguments of enormous relevance to the cause of a global civilization - providing a platform for the reconciliation and mutual enrichment of the knowledge that doubts and the knowledge that is certain.

A man born twice

When in September 1947, shortly after celebrating his seventieth birthday, Ananda Coomaraswamy died, unexpectedly cutting short his preparations to return with his wife to India ("We mean to remain in India, now a free country, for the rest of our lives," he had announced to his friends) [5] there began that assiduous, patient and devoted reconstruction of the image of both man and thinker by scholars from every part of the world, which continues to this day. "I shall be content," he had remarked on one occasion, "if my writing have been of help to no more than four or five people." How wrong he was in his

calculations! - Countless people had cause to thank him, and his teachings bear richer fruit with the years.

Among the first to pay tribute to his memory, in Etudes Traditionelles, was Sheikh Abdel Yahya (alias Rene Guenon), the scholar and interpreter of traditional thought, whose name had frequently been linked with Coomaraswamy's between the Thirties and mid-Forties, the most prolific period for both men[6]. Indeed, this meeting of minds ideally calls for separate analytical treatment, seeing that in 1977, the anniversary of Coomaraswamy's birth, it was the driving force behind studies by distinguished exponents of esotericism of the various currents - from Frithjof Schuon to Whitall N. Perry, from Marco Pallis to Shaya. Meanwhile experts in Oriental thought, comparative scholars, art historians and historians of religion (Mircea Eliade in particular) were building up that vast body of critical writings examined in his doctoral thesis on Coomaraswamy by Roger Lipsey, subsequent editor of the Princeton Selected Essays and author of the biography (see note 3). The latter was made possible by the generous collaboration of Coomaraswamy's widow, Dona Luisa, and after her death, of their son Rama. When his father died, Pallis records, Rama was a small boy coming to grips for the first time with the study of Sanskrit and Tibetan. He went on to become a surgeon, a profession which he still practices today, in Connecticut[7].

The index of Coomaraswamy's works, edited by the National Museum of New Delhi[8], is an invaluable source of more than biographical information. If one skims through it from the first to the last title, spanning the years 1900 to 1951, there writ clear are the vicissitudes of Coomaraswamy's life and the multiplicity of his talents - as natural scientist, philologist and aesthetician. The wide dissemination of the writings and, in many cases, their extempore nature - due to chance professional occasions, to the vast web of his relations with other scholars, but also to spontaneous flights of the mind, to the sheer pleasure of research as an end in itself - explain his authorial presence under the imprints of both major and minor publishers. Indeed, in his youth he became his own publisher when, in his country house at Broad Campden, he installed the Kelmscott Press, formerly the property of William Morris, who had used it for his remarkable edition of Chaucer, designed and printed with such painstaking care. Coomaraswamy himself hand-bound all 1075 copies of *The Deeper Meaning of Struggle* (1907), which set forth the theory behind the independence programme for Sri Lanka and India; the 425 copies of *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (1908), the work in which he revealed his precocious expertise in that neglected field; and the 279 copies of *The Aims of Indian Art*, in which he outlined the best means of safeguarding the artistic and archaeological patrimony of the sub-continent. But the catalogue has further resonances, for if we give biographical body to the places, dates and

titles found there, there emerges a fairly complete picture of Coomaraswamy the man.

His surname reflects the Tamil origin of his father's family, who settled in Jaffna (Sri Lanka) at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. His father, Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy Mudalyar - the first non-Christian Asian barrister to be admitted to the London law-courts- and his mother, Elizabeth Clay Beeby, a lady of a good Kentish family, celebrated Ananda's birth in Colombo on 22nd. August 1877. The choice of name (Sanskrit for 'Beatitude') was to prove auspicious, and even if there is no way of knowing what hopes the parents had for their son, the elder Coomaraswamy's habit of study and his strict Hindu devoutness can only have left their mark on Ananda. Sir Muthu, however, died so early that the child was left without so much as a visual memory of him; while his mother's decision to move back to England was the first decisive event in the life of that only child. In the schools and drawing rooms of the best London society, he absorbed and adopted the manners of his social class, but his upbringing and innermost *forma mentis* remained Brahmin, and the ties with the house of his ancestors, encouraged not least by his mother, remained firm : at the age of ten he received instruction from his cousin for the Shivaite rite of the second birth, followed by his consacration in the family temple.

Coomaraswamy's Science degree and brilliant doctoral thesis in Geology at London University earned him the post of Head of Minerological Research in Colombo at the age of twenty-seven. The first thirty titles in the catalogue, when set against the succeeding fifty (though a complete inventory would run to a thousand) strike a curious note: *Serendibite, A new Boro-silicate from Ceylon, Radiolaria in Gondwana Beds Near Madras, The Point de Galle Group* or the report on his discovery of thorianite, would have more than sufficed to make for a distinguished career. Yet this career was, so to speak, 'nipped in the bud'. Indeed, the Guide to the Colombo Museum, dated 1905, provides the first signs that his interests were shifting. Even if the text contains a meticulously detailed account of the rocks and minerals of Ceylon, the inventory of archaeological items, of the statuary and ancient bronzes show that his study of the forms of nature had now joined hands with that of artistic forms.

The genesis of the aesthetic theory formulated years later on the Thomist principle : "Art is the imitation of Nature in her manner of operation"[9] should be viewed in the light of those parallel approaches of the geologist and naturalist with the art-historian at the outset of Coomaraswamy's career - work which brought his life and ideas to their second decisive turning point. The on-the-spot scientific investigations gave way to feverish inland expeditions : the ancient

capitals of the Buddhist kingdoms with their stone colossi revealed the infinite beauty of the works of the past, side by side with the brimming and exhuberant beauty of the villages, a veritable living archive of peasant culture. A beauty and culture which cried out to be known, appreciated, cherished and saved from "corrupting" Western influence. Yet the first time that Coomaraswamy had heard that adjective uttered, he was thousands of miles from his island- in London, in the circle of William Morris, the poet and social reformer who preached the regeneration of the consciousness and welfare of the masses through the revival of manual artisan activities (in printing techniques, as noted above, interior decoration, ornamental design and cloth-dyeing). In Morris's circle much was said about the impoverishment of the quality of life in already heavily industrialized mass societies, such as England. Influenced by these ideas and by Morris's personal charisma, the young Coomaraswamy, as his biographers emphasize to a man, became, in the crucial years of his coming to maturity as an art-historian and of his political commitment, an oriental William Morris.

On the plane of intellectual creativity, he wrote, composed, translated, collected art objects, catalogued and interpreted them, building up a history of the minor arts and of iconography in south-east Asia which has not been improved on. In India he was particularly drawn to the art of the Mogul Renaissance between the 16th and 17th centuries, and to the extraordinary symbiosis (a real aesthetic *koine*), between the arts of the court, such as the miniature, and popular and local arts, permeated both by the motifs of classical epic and by the devotional fervour of the pan-Indian cult of Krishna, with its iconographic counterpoint of mystics and sensuality.

On the political plane, in Calcutta at the right hand of Rabindranath Tagore, Coomaraswamy embraced *Swadeshi*, the Gandhian independence movement, and promoted initiatives for safeguarding the Indian artistic patrimony, arousing perplexity and embarassment in New Delhi no less than in London.

In the ten years from 1906 to 1916, the catalogue lists writings on questions of social criticism and political theory, two translations from the Icelandic *Voluspa*, essays on musical aesthetics, poetry criticism and analytical studies of folklore and iconography - such as the famous *Dance of Shiva*, the French translation of which, as Eliade recalls, appeared with long, enthusiastic review by Romain Rolland[10]. Besides these, there are monographs on the arts of the Mogul court: *Rajput Painting, Mughal Portraiture* and *Originality in Mughal Painting*. These, together with his precious collection of miniatures, were, so to speak, Coomarswamy's passport to the United States when, as *persona non grata* after refusing to join the coloured troops in the British Army on the outbreak of the First World War,

he accepted Denman W. Ross's offer of a post at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The section of the museum devoted to Indian, Islamic and Far-eastern art, one of the richest and best documented outside Asia, and the scrupulous contributions to its *Fine Arts Bulletin* are entirely Coomaraswamy's work.

Towards Vanaprasthya

From 1932, when he married for the fourth time, but particularly in the ten years that followed, several subtle interior changes, which did not however escape the notice of his family, imperceptibly modified Coomaraswamy's life. What was happening was at once inevitable and momentous : he was growing old. Indian wisdom was careful to provide a system of rules for the passage from one to the other of the four main stages of life - childhood, youth, maturity and old age - assigning to each the style and setting fitting to it. Thus, after *brahmacarin* (study and education) and *grhasthya* (professional responsibility and marriage), *vanaprasthya* and *sanyasin* prescribed the abandonment of family and social duties, and the espousal of an alert and aloof solitude.

Coomaraswamy adapted to the style of *vanaprasthya* by degrees. He began by cutting down on public commitments. the hours not spent among his books were taken up in tending his garden, long tramps through the country, solitary walks along the seashore. The waters, the earth, the sky, the sun- all the forms of pulsing life now met in the rarefied spaces of a unified mind.

On the evening of his last birthday he took leave of his friends in the age-old manner : palms joined, murmuring *svaga*, he explained that this form of valediction contained a dual desire : "May you come into your own, that is may I know and become what I am, no longer this man So-and-So, but the Self that is also the Being of all beings, my self and your Self"[11].

The paths of writing

A few words on Coomaraswamy's style of writing would not be out of place here. And what comes into mind once more is a village, one of those many inland villages of Sri Lanka and India with which he was familiar : a jumble of rooftops, a widening in the street and a temple. But one's mind runs still more strongly along the roads leading to this village : highway and narrow secondary tracks. The contrast between the two goes back to the Vedas, where it recurs at once literally, allegorically and anagogically. *Marga*, the main or 'master' road, derives from *mrg*, to pursue, to go hunting, beating trails. A 'hunt' which in Vedic times meant both physically capturing one's prey and ritually hunting after the divine : two forms of nourishment which, though on different planes, are homologous, indispensable and effective.

Desi ('path') in turn derives from the word dis ('to point to'), and stands for native, local, secular as opposed to *marga*, which means other-worldly, solar.

Highways and byways run through Coomaraswamy's writings too. the former are the spacious and luminous course of his exposition. The writer is there to pursue and capture his prey, namely his subject and this requires subterfuges, unnerving pauses in the chase and even the use of traps. The more arduous and intricate the subject, the more elusive; and so disorienting manoeuvres are called for, the beating of secondary, 'local' trails. In the text this network of paths is formed by the notes, a maze in which the reader can easily get lost. But losing oneself proves a blessing, since by persevering, one regains the highway with the advantage of having acquired some inside experience of an enterprise which has called into play the knowledge, memory, attention and heart of the writer. "I have not remained unaffected by the doctrines I have met with and to which the study of art has led me, " Coomaraswamy had confided at the farewell dinner- "*Intellige ut credas*, 'Understand in order to believe', in my case has had its effect"[12].

Then there is the question of language, the type of 'dialect' used by Commaraswamy in his treatises and scholarly essays :

> We all speak an identical spiritual language which, though employing different words, expresses the same ideas, and very often by way of identical expressions.
>
> To put it another way: there exists a universally intelligible language- not simply verbal but visual as well - of the fundamental ideas on which the various civilizations have been built[13].

The command of many ancient languages - from Old Norse to Sanskrit to Pali - had enabled him to distinguish that essential invariance at its sources and to make it his own. This explains why his writings dense as they are with references to the major texts of Eastern and Western thought and to the celebrated commentaries on them, are at one with these works, echoing yet never betraying them.

The way West and the way East

Aesthetics, as Coomaraswamy conceives it - following a line of thought which dates back to the Tenth Century - is nothing other than a branch of metaphysics, one of the 'local' byways which leads out into the highway of ultimate conceptual abstractions. Western and Eastern metaphysics had seen eye to eye in this matter until the eve of the European Renaissance. A shared outlook

founded not on external contingent circumstances, registered by the graph of history from its perspective of linear time, but on a structure of the human mind common to us all, which forms its world picture (the 'real' and the 'possible', the 'thinkable', the 'imaginary' and the 'imaginal') along common lines, notwithstanding differences in cultural latitude. Hence the importance of the comparative method, which enables one to perceive analogies and constants in cultural models spatially and temporally distant from one another.

For the work of art and the aesthetic experience therein derived to work as vehicles of metaphysical knowledge, the rules which they share need to be as rigorous as those of a rite. To a greater or lesser extent - in sacred or secular art respectively - every artisan or artistic operation is a liturgy. The artist and artisan, therefore, are required to submit to an exacting and scrupulous discipline, a form of yoga.

> The whole process, up to the point of manufacture, belongs to the established order of personal devotions, in which worship is paid to an image mentally conceived (*dhyatva yajet*); in any case, the principle involved is that true knowledge of an object is not obtained by merely empirical observation or reflex registration (*pratyaksa*), but only when the knower and known, seer and seen meet in an act transcending distinction (*anayor advaita*)[14].

Emotional gratification and so-called 'freedom of expression' are, consequently, discouraged, in favour, however, of a subtler and more rewarding conquest - as in the case of those Taoist and Zen Landscape painters, bound to the rules and yet, or rather for this very reason, triumphing in the unexpected freedom of the brush-stroke which, appears as it were, 'out of the blue'. At that moment, mind, hand and heart respond in unison, and the artist who "becomes what he does" is overwhelmed with joy. As for the ladder of the nine aesthetic 'tastes' (*rasa*), from it the Indian rhetoricians constructed a geometry of the passions, with Drama as its supreme backcloth but also its vertical therapeutic solution, as, incidentally, Aristotle had earlier understood.

Patiently, well aware of how insensitive the modern European mind is to such reasoning, Coomaraswamy formulates and re-formulates that single lesson, applying it to the most diverse contexts. To cite an example, in *What is Civilization*?, a paper written in memory of Albert Schweitzer,-he showed how the Sanskrit word *purusa* ('man') contains together with the idea of 'civilization', that of *polis*, St. Augustine's dual 'city', in the same sense that purusa is dual: *duo sunt in homine* - the I 'person', to whom immortality is denied, and the impersonal self to which death is denied[15].

Writing in 1958, Umberto Eco, to his credit, illustrated Coomaraswamy's thought in terms of its relationship to *Indian aesthetics and Western aesthetics:*

> Western philosophy has had Plotinus, but it has also vigorously resisted too great a commitment to Plotinus; and if it is also true that such doctrines as Schopenhauer's of the 'pure contemplating eye' form a legitimate part of Western aesthetics, nevertheless, since one has to choose one's ascendants well, we prefer to recognize, as the most vital characteristic of Western art, the functional, communicative (rather than revelationary) conception of art, and the constant attempt to extend the artistic and aesthetic to discursive activity as well, without limiting them to the Intuitive moment, or reserving them for the creative and diffusive activity of an All which speaks within us, and in which we in turn should lose ourselves at the moment of artistic apprehension[16].

A reflection admirable for its honesty, since it lays bare the calculation behind the intellectual systems which have triumphed in the West in the modern era. Every individual clearly has the right to choose his own ascendants *well.* Coomaraswamy exercised that right, calculating in turn the effects of his choice: "one becomes what one thinks", the Upanishad reminds us.

Notes and References

1. Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Oxford University Press, 1988.
2. Foreword by Seyed Hossein Nasr, Golgenooze Press, Ipswich, 1989.
3. Prologos Books, Berwick on Tweed, 1988. Further bibliographical details may be found in the 'Bibliography Appendix' of Selected Letters, cit., pp.449 seq.; while the most complete and authoritative biographical source to date is the third volume of the trilogy A.K.Coomaraswamy, Selected Papers (I: Traditional Art and Symbolism; II: Metaphysics; III: His life and Work), ed. Roger Lipsey, Bollingen Series LXXXIX, Princeton University Press, 1977.
4. To date, some ten of A.K.Coomaraswamy's works, comprising both complete volumes and essays, have been translated into Italian. The author of the present article has given considerable attention to Coomaraswamy's aesthetic thought in: *L'armonia estetica. Lineamenti di una civilta laotziana,* Dedalo, Bari, 1974; *La patola e la forma,* Dedalo, Bari, 1977; *La cognizione estetica tra Oriente e Occidente,* Guerini & Associati, Milano, 1987. She has also introduced and translated

Transformation of Nature in Art (La trasfigurazione della natura nell 'arte, Rusconi, Milano, 1977) and *Christian & Oriental Philosophy of Art (Come interpretare un'opera d' arte*, Rusconi, Milano, 1977). She is the editor of a selection of aphorisms, *Aforismi di Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, Stile Regina, Roma, 1988.

5. He made this announcement during the dinner in celebration of his seventieth birthday at the Harvard Club, commemorated by J. Marshall Plumer in 'The Farewell Dinner', *Sources of Wisdom*, ed. Rama Coomaraswamy, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1981.
6. In 'A Fateful Meeting of minds : A. K. Coomaraswamy and Rene Guenon, *DILIP*, Jan-Feb 1978, Marco Pallis recalls how it was at his instigation, and that of his friend Nicholson, that the two thinkers first came into contact. Many of Coomaraswamy's most important essays were translated and reprinted over the years in *Etudes traditionelles*.
7. Rama P. Coomaraswamy, guardian and editor of his father's works, is himself an essayist on religious, and partiularly Christian, themes. See, for example, *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*, Perennial Books, London, n.d.
8. *A Catalogue of the Special Exhibition of Paintings and Books in Honour of the Birth Centenary of Ananda Coomaraswamy, National Museum, New Delhi, 1976. (The index of the works is updated to 1951).*
9. See 'The Nature of Medieval Art', *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, previously published by Luzac & Co., 1943, under the title 'Why Exhibit Works of Art?,.
10. Translated by Madeleine Rolland in 1922, the book met with immediate critical success and was discussed in the leading European literary journals. In Bucharest Mircea Eliade reviewed it on two occasions, in 1937 and 1943, as he himself recalls in 'Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Henry Corbin: concerning the *Theosophia perennis*' in *Briser le toit de la maison*, intr. and notes by A. Paruit, Gallimard, Paris, 1986.
11. In 'the Farewell Dinner', *cit.* See note 5.
12. Ibid.
13. In *The Religious Basis of the Forms of Indian Society*, New York, 1946.
14. *Transformation of Nature in Art*, Dover Publications, New York, 1934, p.6.
15. *'What is Civilization?' and Other Essays*, ed. Rama Coomaraswamy, cit.
16. Umberto Eco, *La definizione dell'arte*, Ist. ed., Bompiani, Milano, 1958, P. 77. Translation from the original.